

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 22 APRIL 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, UllaKarin Clark, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Wayne Smith

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Bishop-Firth
Rachel Burgess
Andy Croy
Richard Dolinski
Lindsay Ferris
Paul Fishwick
Maria Gee
David Hare
Clive Jones
Sarah Kerr
Tahir Maher
Ian Pittock
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Caroline Smith

102. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

We have been in lockdown for 4 or 5 weeks now and I have been awestruck at the whole of the Council, Officers and Members, and the way they have put their all into the crisis. We have achieved a huge amount which I never, ever expected that we would achieve. I am really very, very, proud to be the Leader of the Council and very, very, proud of all of you and everything that has been achieved.

The Deputy Leader of the Council made the following statement:

I think it is important that I just say a few words which relates to Covid-19. As a Council we have always run our finances in a way that seeks to deliver the most cost effective services to residents. By working in accordance with the highest standards of financial management practice and ensuring that our overall financial standing is strong. With Covid-19 we now find ourselves in uncharted water as with all other councils; some of which we know are not run as well as WBC. However the challenges even for us are severe which means that we must continue to manage the Council's accounts with extreme rigour and ensure our limited resources are as secure as possible and are used wisely, targeted to those in most need in these times of emergency.

We will also be doing all we can to ensure that national Government provide the finance we need to help us through these very difficult times as we cannot manage our way through this with our current depleted income and resources. We best serve our residents by making sure that we support and aid goes where it is most needed and help protect the

residents whose need is greatest and this will be our objective throughout these dangerous and difficult times.

Please everyone keep safe and follow the Government guidelines.

103. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

104. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 20 February 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

105. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

106. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

106.1 Peter Dennis asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

How many empty homes are there in Wokingham Borough at this time and can you break the information down into the following elements please?

- (a) No of Social Homes including WBC owned; and
- (b) Private

Answer

All the homes, if you just take homes which are owned not by the Council, there are 92 homes which are empty but are exempt from Council Tax. Examples of where exemptions may apply include where someone is permanently receiving care in a hospital or a nursing home, where the owner has died or gone to prison, or where property is owned by a charity.

There are a further 90 homes which have been empty for over 2 years of which 80 are currently liable for a 100% uplift in Council Tax.

There are 483 completed new builds in the Borough yet to be occupied and these are the ones that we know of that have been notified to us by builders.

In addition there are approximately 1,200 homes which have been empty for between one day and two years.

With regard to the Council's homes (the affordable homes) we currently have 29 WBC houses which are in the Housing Revenue Account that are empty and they are waiting for work to be done on them before they are allocated.

There are 24 WBC owned homes currently empty which are awaiting a decision on their further use and we have seven empty properties, some owned by housing associations, including Loddon Homes, which are extra care properties awaiting allocation.

Supplementary Question

So with that number of houses what impact does that have, or do they have, on both the Local Plan Update and the reduction in Council tax revenue?

Supplementary Answer

Well I mean to say first of all they don't, as I understand it, with the exception of the 483 homes standing empty which are the new builds which are yet to be sold or where the mortgage has fallen through or whatever I do not think that affects our housing numbers to be candid with you.

The other issue around the income. We collect income from all those homes except the 92 homes which are for people that are in some sort of distress situation and we collect normal council tax from the 1,200 which have been unoccupied from one day to two years and we collect twice as much from the 90 homes which have actually been empty for over two years so the impact really is not a lot I guess.

107. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

107.1 Ian Pittock asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

When we built Bohunt School, we promised local residents that we would deliver a cycle path down the Nine Mile Ride from Gorse Ride South to Park Lane and thence into the school. The plan involved moving the road south by one metre and widening the existing footway, removing some obstacles. This was reneged upon, some months before the school opened, when Highways found some property owners had 'acquired' Highways land and that this would take time to correct. Members and officials agreed the FBC greenway would be built as a helpful measure but that we would still need to come back to build the NMR cycle path. Highways acquired software to properly record ownership of land and so should now be in a position to start recovering WBC land so that this project can proceed. Currently, Bohunt pupils cycle down the existing narrow and dangerous footway, an accident waiting to happen, whilst others are driven to school which is entirely against the ethos of building the school in the south in the first place. When will Highways re-commence this project as promised to local residents?

Answer

The Council provided both a safe lit cycling route from Finchampstead to Bohunt School via California Country Park which has proved very popular with local residents (known as the California Greenway), and constructed a new safe pedestrian route to Bohunt School using the existing footway on Nine Mile Ride and new footway and crossing on Park Lane. Whilst the Council considers that it has made adequate provision for this School at the current time, we will of course review whether any further cycling infrastructure is required once the Nine Mile Ride extension has been completed.

Supplementary Question

I accept everything you have said there but we agreed to come to this matter two years after we opened Bohunt and it has now been over three years. We are now in the process of getting ready to build the Nine Mile Ride extension (south) out of Arborfield to join the Nine Mile Ride at Park Way. The extension will have a cycle path which ends at Park Way

whilst the road continues onwards down the Nine Mile Ride. How are you going to explain why the cycle path ends at Park Way? Remember children are cycling down the footway down Nine Mile Ride now irrespective of the greenway.

Supplementary Answer

The information I have got is actually that the greenway is relatively well used. Obviously we have got an issue with the width of the footpath and the fact that originally there were various encroached walls and things onto the footpath which made extending it into a cycleway impossible. Given that I am always happy to look at routes and see if we can improve the usage of cycleways so that children actually use the safest route to school.

107.2 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

I am delighted to see the first draft of the Arts and Culture Strategy being presented tonight. I would like to take the opportunity to thank Officers, and in particular Grant Thornton, for their commitment to this.

The current restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of arts and culture to the health and wellbeing of people, and I believe the current circumstances add weight to the need for the development and adoption of this Strategy. When we were developing this Strategy prior to the lock-down, and as is still written in the proposal before you, the public consultation was set for May and June of this year. What plans are in place to mitigate any restrictions that may be faced by people or arts and cultural organisations that would want to participate in the consultation should the lockdown be extended to include part or all of the proposed consultation period?

Answer

I pleased to see that you are delighted and many thanks for your question. I fully concur with your sentiments with regard to the significance of arts and culture to health and wellbeing both generally and in particular during these exceptional and difficult times.

As you know this report was originally due to come to the meeting of the Executive in March, which unfortunately had to be cancelled because of the current situation, but I too am really pleased that we have now been able to reconvene and can consider this draft Arts and Culture Strategy. I believe that widespread engagement and feedback is essential to help us to further develop the Strategy and an associated action plan that fosters extensive collaboration to deliver on our ambitions for arts and culture right across the Borough.

In this context I am pleased to confirm that our newly appointed Cultural Development Officer, Jodie Sadler, started in the post this week and will have a key role in promoting the Strategy to arts and cultural organisations and working with them to develop more detailed delivery plans. Equally essential is wider public consultation and, in my view, this engagement needs to be more than virtual. Our initial consultation plans were looking to work with a range of partners to promote and get feedback on the Strategy at a number of key cultural events across the Borough as well as via social media and on-line channels. As this will now not be possible across the May/June period as originally planned, even if the lockdown is eased somewhat, I will be asking Officers to re-plan and extend the consultation period for as long as possible to facilitate the well-resourced active and face

to face engagement that I think is absolutely needed and that our residents deserve; so yes we will be extending as I have said.

Supplementary Question

Thank you that is the kind of answer I was after. Obviously we can start some of the consultation even if we are in lockdown looking at social media channels because a lot of people are on there a lot more frequently at present and an extended period would be great. I would be keen to know when the working group meetings can reconvene even in a virtual manner?

Supplementary Answer

I am looking into that now and I will get back to you very soon Sarah because we have started other consultations and other meetings using this facility called Teams and so I will get that information across to you very soon.

107.3 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

Residents are asking when RE3 in Smallmead, Reading will reopen? Their concern is founded on the increased occurrence of unwanted fly tipping in the Borough.

Answer

This is an important question Tahir and one that everyone is asking.

Re3 is a partnership between Bracknell Forest, Reading and Wokingham, as you know, and manages the Household Waste Recycling Centres in both Reading and Bracknell. These were shut in March in line with the Government lock down announcement about non-essential travel and given the inability to manage social distancing at these sites.

The partnership is working with the operator of the sites to review the situation to see if a workable solution can be found to address social distancing concerns to allow the tips to open safely whilst ensuring that staff and residents can be protected.

In relation to fly tipping, there is a risk that it could increase but we hope that residents will continue to ensure that their waste is disposed of appropriately until these centres can re-opened. We are pleased to confirm that all of our other waste collection services are operating normally and we are delivering garden waste bins and bags.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for highlighting effectively the concern and need to care, which we must adhere to for ourselves because of Covid 19. and I totally agree with you on that.

I know that supermarkets are providing a necessary service and managing distance. Can we not take their lead and apply similar discipline in order to maybe reconsider opening Re3 or do we need some sort of assistance from the Government to do something more countrywide as it were with any kind of operational guidelines or anything like that?

Supplementary Answer

As I said Tahir we are working on it as we speak to actually have these centres opened up again and we are working on various options to look at how we can improve the social

distancing and allow people to come to the sites in an orderly fashion. So the Officers are working on it at this very moment and we will hopefully announce the news very soon.

107.4 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Re Agenda Item 110: Firstly, my appreciation to the Officer for forwarding the business case on request. I am slightly surprised it isn't attached to the report, as it surely ought to be in front of decision-makers as the basis on which they are making their decision.

On reading the business case it indicates that that there are potential forecast benefits in decongestion of traffic along the A4 corridor (within the Reading Borough Council area).

However, I cannot find anywhere the potential increase in traffic along the Wokingham Borough Council section of the A4 due to residents finding the new Park and Ride more attractive, some who currently travel by rail from Twyford and Maidenhead stations, (as per DfT TAG unit M5-1 modelling parking and park and ride). Nor the additional journeys made by drivers by-passing the Winnersh Park and Ride and using the Thames Valley Park and Ride.

These switching of modes and additional journeys would add to more traffic, increase air pollution, noise, accidents etc and wipe out many of the forecast benefits that this Business case shows.

Has this assessment been made and if so, what was it?

Answer

I think the issue here is that the decision to actually build the Park and Ride, which was the one that the business case was related to, was made about three years ago. So the reason the business case was not in the paperwork tonight is that the Executive paper is actually seeking to tender the bus service to service the park and ride because of some changes in circumstance. Originally we were hoping to use the Thames Valley Park bus but that has not been possible so the reason the business case is not in there is because that decision has already been made; the horse has already bolted in that it was made quite some time ago.

The business case itself was reviewed both by the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Berkshire Local Transport Body and they were satisfied that the business case was adequate at the time as well.

Supplementary Question

It does not actually answer my question because my question was: "where does that show it within the business case" because I cannot find it at all. To me that is still background papers.

However my supplementary is about the actual bus service itself because the business case on this project already has several major risks and one of these was the use of the current Thames Valley Park shuttle bus identified as ID 1.5 in the risk assessment with a risk assessment of very high and a cost impact of £250k-£500k.

The Borough Council have dismissed the Thames Valley Park management request for an additional sum of money over and above the 50% previously agreed and I do not know what that is as I cannot find that in the business case either. Now that the bus service is proposed in the report tonight to be put out to tender the Borough Council must have an estimated cost of running this service. What is it compared to, the 50% contribution previously offered by Thames Valley Park, and how will that be funded?

Supplementary Answer

It would be very unwise of me to share in a public meeting any estimates we might have over the cost of something that we were about to tender so I certainly would not do that otherwise you can more or less guarantee what the answer to the tender will be.

As I said before the reason the business case was not in this paperwork is that the decision was made long before my time, and indeed before your time, to actually build this park and ride and that was what the business case related to. The business case does not relate to the tendering of the bus service. I am hoping with the tender that we will actually get a good price from either alternative suppliers or indeed the Thames Valley Park buses.

107.5 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

What is the extent of the contingency plans for Building Control should one or both of the service partners (RBWM and West Berkshire) be unable or unwilling to engage fully in the shared service during the coming or future years?

Answer

The existing shared service agreement is between Wokingham Borough, The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire and runs until 30 June next year. The Royal Borough has recently given notice that they will not be continuing within the shared service after this date; which is the June of next year.

Work is commencing on the drafting of a new agreement in time for prospective partners to agree and sign prior to the end of the current agreement. This will include Wokingham and West Berkshire Councils and the business will remain viable on this basis. We are investigating whether there are other new partners who may wish to have an interest in joining the shared service to achieve greater economies of scale which could deliver efficiencies.

Supplementary Question

It is disappointing that there is no financial information supporting the business case. It is difficult to assess the risks involved in taking the decision if we cannot see the total income and totals which WBC has committed to the Building Control Service as a whole. Will you commit to providing sufficient financial information after this meeting and in the future to underpin the business case with the aim of making transparent the context of this decision?

Supplementary Answer

I will look into that Rachelle and I will get back to you.

107.6 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

The health risks which asbestos poses to residents are, of course, well known and very serious. A friend of mine recently lost her husband, much too young, to a disease which was almost certainly caused by the fact that he had worked with asbestos in the past. He was just one of the 20 tradespeople who the Health and Safety Executive estimate lose their lives every week to asbestos-related illnesses. The organisation 'Asbestos Victim Support' says that the potential health risks for Council housing tenants 'cannot be underestimated. Especially for those who may have been living for many years in a Council property containing hidden asbestos'.

I am glad to see that the Council is tackling this issue to ensure the safety of residents living in homes owned by the Borough, and the tradespeople who undertake repairs.

We all fully appreciate the uncertainty which the current Covid-19 pandemic is causing to all our plans. What impact do you anticipate it having on the letting of this contract and the subsequent management and removal of asbestos?

Answer

As you know, like everybody else, we have a number of houses which were built at a time when asbestos was considered to be a perfectly acceptable building product but we do have an incumbent asbestos management contractor and they are able to manage the immediate service requirements during the Covid-19 outbreak, and for the period of the procurement for the new contract, which you will see if you hang around I will be presenting for approval tonight to the Executive.

We have researched the market and have identified an established framework provider to use for the procurement. The asbestos management framework has been awarded to a reputable contractor, and we do not anticipate that the Covid-19 outbreak will cause the procurement to be delayed or that it will impact the mobilisation of the new contract following an award. As I say I will be presenting that later on to the Executive for their approval.

Supplementary Question

Given the enormous risks of asbestos to health and the fact that many residents and tradespeople are not confident in recognising or safely handling asbestos what steps will the Council take to ensure that all residents living in Council owned properties containing asbestos, and all those involved in the repair and maintenance of those properties, have the full information that they need to keep themselves safe? Including the exact location of asbestos in these homes, the risks asbestos poses to health and the precautionary steps they need to take for their health and safety.

Supplementary Answer

The new contract that we will be letting tonight, if it is approved by the Executive, will be a management contract and their job will be actually to go round and manage asbestos and eradicate it as quickly as possible in the Council homes we have got where it is in there.

I would say that the amount of asbestos in our homes, as we are delivering newer homes, of course they will not have it so hopefully it will be something that will get eradicated relatively quickly. We are putting aside £500k for the management of this contract.

107.7 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Thank you for the new Adult Social Care Strategy, I especially like the fact that it is focussed on individuals and preventative work, that I championed some 16 years ago. I agree with much of the report but am concerned that you seem to assume: 1) everyone has family and friends; 2) Everyone wants to be independent and help themselves. Some people come to a situation where they give up and need external support, through loneliness, illness or disability. I agree we desperately need to reduce isolation and loneliness, so people can live happier and more independently for longer, but some are beyond that. I applaud the work The LINK does, your case study of extra care for Margaret is heartening, but I know there are people who need residential support and are not meeting strict criteria. It seems that individuals have to get to a crisis point to qualify for anything. How, may I ask, are you going to provide for these people who seem not to be unwell enough to receive support and so make their lives worth living?

Answer

I am pleased that you have recognised personalisation and prevention as key principles of our Strategy. This will drive our work for the next five years and beyond. I would say that this document is of course a strategy and as part of a process, should this be approved tonight, we will now move onto designing the layer of services that fit beneath it.

We recognise fully that not everyone has family or friends that they can rely on. Our Strategy refers to a community led model of support where we, as a collective community, take responsibility and focus on people's situations and try to design services to match needs. No one should feel that their life is not worth living and we acknowledge there is much work to do to enable some of our residents to develop and build the skills and friendships to sustain themselves. This Strategy articulates how vitally important it is to understand people's needs and aspirations and to provide targeted support. This is also about designing services to match needs. This will deliver improvement in life chances and opportunities to become more active and engaged residents, with a lifestyle that is their choice and is meaningful and provides purpose. We appreciate that this is a process that is going to take time.

We acknowledge some people, as in your question, may not meet the criteria in place for support and therefore it is essential that there is a wide range of community based provision that can support them beyond this. You were present at our first 'Designing our Neighbourhoods' meeting, as was John Halsall, and know that this part of the process is about advertising, promoting and encouraging the full range of services in the Borough. Also the Voluntary Strategy, which is on the agenda tonight, is part of developing the level of services beyond that; encouraging the voluntary sector to step forward and do all the things they do well to help in this situation.

So where people stay at home we will support them to live independently as well as promoting a full range of day opportunities and activities to provide physical as well as mental stimulation as well as befriending and network opportunities. All of our services will be designed to be available to people before they get to a crisis point and the emphasis will be at all times to work with the community and our partners in the voluntary sector to advertise and promote the full range of what can be offered across the Borough so that everybody is aware of this well before they get to crisis point.

Supplementary Question

I was wondering has the Council, during the Covid crisis, brought to the attention of the Council more people who need the support that you are offering and even residential care at this time?

Supplementary Answer

As you stated in your introduction the Covid crisis has obviously been a big challenge to the Department and yes I recognise the work of the Officers and all the people in the voluntary sector who have worked alongside them basically in providing services.

The answer is basically many of the most vulnerable we knew of before and we have been ringing them regularly to check on how they are and what services they need. It has brought forward other people and I think obviously the range of voluntary services in the community were put together very, very quickly; which is a credit to everybody who was involved with them. But now we are in the process where the systems are in place and we can begin to take stock a little bit and listen and learn from what has been going on and make sure that is incorporated in what we do medium to longer term. One day this will be over.

107.8 Maria Gee had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question but due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

Re Agenda Item 111: The fees charged are made on a cost recovery basis. This must be predicated on an assumed level of activity, for example, number of applications by type. Given the expected contraction in the construction sector caused by Covid 19, what is the likely excess of expenses over income (if any) to be borne by WBC should activity drop to (a) 80% or (b) 50% of the activity levels used to underpin the setting of charges in the current document?

Answer

Building Control does not have any control on the nature of the projects submitted to it and the progress of projects to commencement on site. Hence as a result; income levels inevitably vary month by month depending on the nature of the work being submitted and commencing on site across the shared service at a particular point in time. Comparison with historical information should therefore be treated with some caution.

However, based on the activity levels for 2019/20; during quarter 1 (April to June 2019) total income across the Shared Service was approximately £325k. Based on the income and workload levels across each of the three authority areas during 2019/20; this would equate to a contribution to costs by WBC of approximately 40%.

Based on the Shared Service's workload during this period; this would equate to a potential cost to WBC of approximately £130k; assuming that no income was received.

If the recommended increase in charges is adopted; this would help to offset the above cost to WBC by approximately £11k to £119k.

Based on the above assumptions in respect of a reduction in income levels; these would equate to a cost to WBC of approximately £24k (drop to 80% of activity level) and £60k (drop to 50% of activity level) respectively.

The figures given above will however be subject to the extent of the potential implications of COVID 19 on the construction industry over the coming months.

107.9 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question but due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

Re Agenda item 104: Reading this report, it seems to be all about building 'greenways' but offers little investment or improvements for our existing and well-trod rights of way.

Many of our existing urban Rights of Way are used by our children to walk to school and by others to commute to work. Compared to most pavements, they are in poor condition and are not maintained to a similar safe and lighted standard that we would expect of urban footpaths and cycle-ways.

Please can you advise on how much funding will be available for updating and improving the existing paths to a decent standard so that they are safe for public use in all weathers and at all times of the day?

Answer

Our Greenway Strategy is funded by and designed as part of the mitigation of the impact of our four strategic development locations; they are mentioned as part of our Rights of Way Improvement Plan for completeness. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) also offers much investment and improvement to the wider network. Indeed the focus of the plan extends far beyond the Greenway Strategy and is primarily about the extent to which the existing PROW network meets the needs of the public over the next 10 years and how efforts can be directed towards improving any gaps in meeting these needs.

The RoWIP includes 6 Statements of Action about how the various gaps identified in the report will be addressed, one of which is "Action 5: Looking after the Network". This includes objectives such as improving the surfacing of existing paths and seeking to install street lighting or illumination on urban paths. This will be done, as the report mentions, using existing funding sources/budgets where possible however additional funding sources will also need to be identified through additional capital bids or from developer contributions.

The Council has a set amount of revenue funding each year which is used to inspect and maintain existing PROWs. This will include maintenance such as filling potholes, cutting hedges back, improving drainage, and repairing gates and stiles. However, since the Borough has over 233km of PROW network, works have to be prioritised based on priority and the popularity of the PROW.

The Council has capital funding set aside to fund the implementation of the Greenways and the Loddon Long Distance Footpath projects. In addition to this, the Council has capital funding to undertake path improvement works, particularly where paths have been affected by developments. Further funding is also allocated for the Byway Resurfacing

Programme. This programme seeks to upgrade the surface of byways where the predominant use of the byway is by vehicles, to a sealed tarmac surface.

We spend approximately £75,000 on maintaining our rights of way network each year. Over the next 3 years, we also have an additional £4,512,000 of capital funding to spend on delivering Greenways, the Loddon Long Distance Path, and byway resurfacing works – all of which contribute towards improving the wider network in the Borough.

107.10 Caroline Smith had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question but due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question

From the onset of the pandemic it has been clear that the volunteers and various charities are helping enormously in providing support and help to the vulnerable in the community and as such should be applauded by everyone. During this time there has been a massive drop of donations to the entire charity sector. Going forward, how will this affect the implementation of the Strategy and WBC's ability to work alongside charities and will financial support be increased from £1.25 million to cover the VCS donation shortfall?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council recognises the extreme pressure that the voluntary sector is under to maintain vital services to vulnerable people during the current extraordinary circumstances. The Covid-19 outbreak has placed significant pressure on the whole Adult Social Care system and we are committed to working together to ensure the best possible outcomes for our local residents.

To support the sector, Adults Social Care will provide a financial uplift to commissioned services in Wokingham. It is expected that this uplift will be in the region of 3% for the current financial year.

Central government is also acting to support the voluntary sector and the Chancellor has announced a £750 million package of support for frontline charities.

[HM Treasury announcement of coronavirus funding for frontline charities](#)

The Government has also said that charities can access many of the measures the Chancellor previously announced for businesses.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) support for businesses](#)

108. RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2020-2030

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Rights of Way Improvement Plan for 2020-2030 which would guide the approach towards improvement of the public rights of way network, including the creation of new routes for both utilitarian use, sustainable transport and leisure.

When introducing the report the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure highlighted that the revised Improvement Plan proposes changes to alter a number of approaches set out in the previous Plan; including the fact that there would be greater emphasis on creating multi-use routes instead of cycle routes which would cater for horse riding as well as cycling, delivering improvements for motor vehicle users were appropriate. In addition proposals to restrict existing vehicle access would be considered along with other options in order to balance the needs of all the users.

It was noted that implementation of the Improvement Plan's proposals were not binding and any actions within the Plan would only be undertaken when the opportunity, funds and resources became available.

RESOLVED: That the Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2020-2030 be approved and adopted.

109. FLY-TIPPING STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Fly-Tipping Strategy which sets out the Council's approach and response to dealing with fly-tipping in order to protect the Borough, keep it clean and enhance its green areas for people to enjoy.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure informed the meeting that a new Strategy had been developed in order to combat the increase in the amount of fly-tipping in the Borough. It was noted that the Strategy was based primarily on prevention which included a strong emphasis on communication and reporting of incidents as well as responding to incidents, enforcement and placing CCTV cameras. Councillor Batth also advised that the Council was working with all its partners in order to make everyone aware of their responsibilities in order to combat the increase in fly-tipping.

In response to Councillor Kaiser's query about whether offenders would be pursued within the extent of the law Councillor Batth reiterated his determination that the Council would do everything it could to bring any offenders to account and ensure they were punished.

Councillor Haitham Taylor voiced her support for the Strategy and stated that she was pleased that CCTV cameras were being deployed as fly-tipping was a real blight on the countryside.

RESOLVED: That the Fly-Tipping Strategy for Wokingham Borough be approved.

110. ADULT SOCIAL CARE STRATEGY

The Executive considered a proposed Adult Social Care Strategy which sets out the Council's strategic priorities for residents, care partners and providers and how improved outcomes would be delivered to residents.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised that the Strategy set out the key aims of the Adult Services' Department for the next five years with the intention of raising the performance of the Department into the top 10% in the country on every measure. The Department was already regarded as "good" but wanted to improve. The Strategy also set out how the Council would work with its partners to deliver its priorities including keeping people safe, preventing and delaying the need for care and support, involving people in their own care and working to deliver quality services whilst delivering the best value for money.

Councillor Margetts highlighted that the Council received 4,345 requests for its services per annum and spent £49.6m per year on support and care; most of which was spent on older people and learning disability support.

Councillor Jorgensen thanked the Executive Member for all the recent efforts of the Adult Social Care Team and acknowledged the great work they had done. In response Councillor Margetts stated that over the last couple of weeks the Adult Social Department

had gone above and beyond the call of duty and their achievements, in collaboration with the voluntary sector, and the amount of support that had been provided across the Borough was really phenomenal.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council's Adult Social Care Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

111. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy which sets out how the Council wish to deliver services, and the role of the voluntary and community sector in improving the quality of life for the Borough's communities.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services went through the report and acknowledged the importance of the voluntary sector in the response to Covid-19 where, at very short notice, groups of charities and voluntary groups had assisted in the delivery of crucial services for the Borough's residents.

Councillor Margetts stated that the Strategy, which had been designed with Involve, had been produced before the recent crisis when, even then, it had been acknowledged that the Council did not have the resources to meet all the needs. Therefore the purpose of the Strategy was to work with the voluntary sector to encourage and incentivise it to assist in those areas which the Council did not have the resources to cover. Previously the voluntary sector had been funded to deliver a block of services but this emphasis had changed to one where individual services would be commissioned, targets set and outcomes monitored. It was noted that the available budget was £1.25m per annum which was currently provided to 22 voluntary sector bodies through 27 contracts.

In addition Councillor Margetts drew Members' attention to the aspiration and aim of creating a new hub for the voluntary sector in central Wokingham, which would be based upon the successful model in Bracknell, and also the fact that a 3% increase in funding was being proposed for all the voluntary groups that were currently supported by the Council.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

112. ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGY 2020-2030

The Executive considered a report setting out a draft Arts and Culture Strategy for 2020-2030 and associated draft statement of intent.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised the meeting that the Council did not currently have an Arts and Culture Strategy. However the aspiration was for the Borough's cultural offer to grow and develop over time in order to significantly enhance the cultural and leisure offers in the Borough for the benefit of the vast majority of residents thereby improving their quality of life and enhancing their wellbeing.

It was noted that a cross party working group had endorsed the Strategy and the intention was that it would be consulted upon extensively with residents and stakeholders and the subsequent results would be considered by the Executive at a future meeting.

Councillor Haitham Taylor stated that she felt that the lack of arts and culture in the Borough was one of the reasons that many employees were leaving the area and moving to London or university cities. She felt that the Strategy was key in drawing together everything that was available in one place so that people can find out exactly what was being offered and where, which would assist with participation and engagement. Offering more arts and culture opportunities would create a more vibrant and much better community and would also assist the economy following Covid-19 by bringing more people into the Borough. In addition delivering a good arts and cultural would provide educational opportunities for children and young people.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the principles and content of the draft Arts and Culture Strategy be endorsed;
- 2) the draft Strategy and statement of intent be approved for consultation with residents and stakeholders;
- 3) the results of the consultation and any resulting changes to the draft Strategy be considered at a future meeting of the Executive.

113. ARBORFIELD AND BARKHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Executive considered a report relating to the adoption of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan following the referendum which was held on 6 February 2020. Of those who voted, 94% voted yes to the question of whether they wished the plan to be used to help determine planning applications within the parishes of Arborfield and Newland and Barkham.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement confirmed that the next step was to adopt the Plan in order that it could become part of the Council's planning policy.

Councillor Kaiser congratulated the parish councils on having such a well written plan which he felt was a good template for any other parish council who wished to put a plan together.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Council be recommended to agree that the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan be "made" (be adopted) to form part of the statutory Development Plan pursuant to Section 38A(4) of The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; and
- 2) that the form, content and publication of the Decision Statement (set out in supporting document Appendix A) be agreed pursuant to Regulation 19 of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) ("the Regulations") in order to give effect to the above recommendation.

114. THAMES VALLEY PARK - PARK AND RIDE BUS SERVICE

The Executive considered a report relating to the Thames Valley Park, Park and Ride Bus Service.

Whilst introducing the report the Executive Member for Highways and Transport clarified why there was a need to tender the Park and Ride bus service. When the bus service

had achieved planning permission, and as stated in the Heads of Terms document, the plan was to give half of the income from the car park to Thames Valley Park themselves in recognition of them diverting their shuttle bus to serve the car park. Unfortunately Thames Valley Park were now reluctant to divert their shuttle bus without a significantly higher financial contribution from the Council. It was noted that if there were any financial implications arising from the tender process then these would be brought back to the Executive.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the tender process be commenced in accordance with the Business Case; and
- 2) it be noted that any further financial implications arising from the tender process will be brought back to Executive for consideration.

115. SHARED SERVICE BUILDING CONTROL CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out revised Shared Service Building Control Charges in order to ensure that the service, between Wokingham, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire, was delivered on a cost recovery basis to meet the statutory responsibilities of the Council.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure explained that the intention had been to consider the charges at the March Executive and increase them from 1 April, which was in line with previous years. Due to Covid-19 the report was delayed and therefore it was proposed that the increased charges, which were agreed by the shared service's Building Control Board, would take effect from 1 May 2020.

RESOLVED: That the setting of Building Control Charges from 1st May 2020, as set out in the report, be agreed.

116. CONTRACT FOR ASBESTOS REMOVALS

The Executive considered a report relating to a procurement business case for a new contract for Asbestos Management and Abatement Services for the Council's housing stock in compliance with its statutory duties.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing informed the meeting that a number of Council houses had, when asbestos was an acceptable building material, previously been built using materials that contained asbestos. As a landlord the Council had a legal duty to manage the asbestos within its buildings and manage the health and safety risks where there was any possibility of tenants or contractors being exposed to fibres of asbestos containing materials. As a result of this duty the Council needs to appoint a suitably qualified, experienced and competent contractor to undertake the controlled removal and disposal of all forms of asbestos containing materials.

The cost was likely to be in excess of £500k and it was noted that this would come from the Housing Revenue Account which was a ring-fenced fund designed to maintain and service the Council's social housing.

RESOLVED: That the Business Case be approved to enable the Housing Service to procure a suitably qualified, experienced and competent contractor for the delivery of Asbestos Management for the Council's housing stock.

117. RECOGNITION OF WORK UNDERTAKEN AND ONE MINUTE SILENCE

The Leader of Council thanked all Councillors, Officers, residents and the voluntary sector for the awesome support and work they had carried out during the Covid-19 emergency. Councillor Halsall also congratulated Susan Parsonage (Chief Executive) and Matt Pope (Director of Adult Services) and his Team for all their hard work in what had been a very difficult period.

One minute silence was then held in recognition of all those who had tragically died during the Covid-19 crisis. Councillor Halsall stated that the Council's thoughts were with them and their families.

Councillor Halsall also thanked all of those who were keeping everyone safe particularly those working in the NHS and the care sector.

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