MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 16 JUNE 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM

Members Present

Councillors: Malcolm Richards (Mayor), Keith Baker (Deputy Mayor), Parry Batth, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Jenny Cheng, UllaKarin Clark, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Andy Croy, Richard Dolinski, Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, David Hare, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Angus Ross, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Adrian Mather, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Oliver Whittle

1. MINUTES' SILENCE

The Council held a minute's silence to honour the memory of those who had sadly passed away as a result of Covid 19.

2. ELECTION OF MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

Councillor Bill Soane, the current Mayor, indicated that he had met many organisations who supported residents throughout his year. He went on to refer to some of the venues that he had opened as Mayor, throughout the year, including the refurbished Loddon Valley Leisure Centre and Elms Field Playground.

Councillor Soane highlighted that he had represented the Borough at the funeral of PC Andrew Harper. He expressed regret that he had been unable to host his spring event to benefit his charity of choice, DEBRA. Just under £7,000 had been raised for the charity during the year.

Councillor Soane thanked the Communications Team, Caroline Kelly, the Mayor's Assistant and Anne Hunter, Democratic Services, who had supported him over his year in office. He thanked his Deputy Mayor Malcolm Richards for his support.

Finally, he thanked his wife Hillary, for her support throughout the year.

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor John Halsall and seconded by Councillor Lindsay Ferris that Councillor Malcolm Richards be elected as Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

3. POINT OF ORDER

At this point in the meeting, 7.15pm, Councillor Chris Smith raised a point of order with regards to the proposal that when a vote was required the Group Leaders indicated the votes of their Groups, with individual Members being given the opportunity to indicate if they disagreed with what their Group Leader had stated. He referred to Rule 4.2.15.3 of the Constitution which stated that 'Unless a ballot or recorded vote is demanded under Rules 4.2.16.4 and 4.2.16.5, the Mayor/Chairman will take the vote by a show of hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting.' He was of the opinion that block voting and proxy voting contravened this,

It was explained that the proposed approach had been discussed with and agreed by the Group Leaders and that it was a pragmatic approach to some of the difficulties of running a Council meeting, virtually. It was noted that some Members who accessed the meeting using tablets did not have the ability to use the 'hands up' function on Microsoft Teams.

Each Member was asked how they wished to vote on the proposal to suspend Rule 4.2.15.3 of the Constitution, for the meeting.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Rule 4.2.15.3 of the Constitution be suspended for the meeting.

4. ELECTION OF MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21 CONTINUED

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Malcolm Richards be elected as Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Councillor Richards made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor Richards thanked the Council for electing him as Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year. He referred to the difficulties brought about by Covid 19 and stated that he hoped that when the pandemic had passed real connections would be re-established. He praised the way the community was working together during the Covid 19 situation.

Councillor Richards selected Home First Wokingham and First Days (Wokingham) as the Mayor's charities for the year.

He thanked Councillor Soane and his wife Hillary for their support over the past year.

Councillor Richards indicated that his consort would be his daughter Christine.

5. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2020/21

The Mayor called for nominations for the office of Deputy Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor John Kaiser and seconded by Councillor John Halsall that Councillor Keith Baker be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Councillor Clive Jones that Councillor Caroline Smith be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Keith Baker be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

Councillor Keith Baker made the statutory acceptance of office pursuant to Section 83 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor Baker thanked the Council for appointing him to the office of Deputy Mayor. He indicated that his wife Marilyn would be his consort for the year.

6. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

7. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

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

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Richard Dolinski declared a Personal Interest in Item 13 Appointment to Outside Bodies on the grounds that he was a Trustee of CLASP which administered the Wokingham Learning Disability Partnership, and was also an honorary employee of the Royal Berkshire Hospital Trust. He did not participate in the votes on the appointment to these organisations.

Councillor Keith Baker declared a Personal Interest in Item 13 Appointment to Outside Bodies on the grounds that he was a Woodley Town Council representative on the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative. He did not participate in the vote on the appointment to this organisation.

Councillor Maria Gee declared a Personal Interest in Item 13 Appointment to Outside Bodies on the grounds that she was a Trustee for the Citizens Advice Bureau on behalf of Wokingham Town Council. She did not participate in the vote on the appointment to this organisation.

9. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

9.1 Alexandra Fraser asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

Would the person and department responsible for the management of Fox Hill Woods please show us their management plan?

Answer

The area known as Fox Hill Woods includes areas that are owned by a number of different private landowners, as well as the areas that are public spaces managed by Wokingham Borough Council.

Council owned areas are managed by Localities Services as a woodland. Whilst we do not have a formal management plan for the site, as in other areas of the Borough the trees are managed in accordance with the Council's agreed tree inspection policy which places trees into different risk zones with associated frequency of monitoring activity. Woodland paths/public rights of way are inspected every seven years, and general woodland is monitored on a reactive basis.

We also maintain it as continuous cover 'forestry' whilst at the same time protecting the

trees under the “Woodland Tree Preservation Order” (This category is designed to safeguard a woodland as a whole rather than the individual trees in it). The continuous cover forestry approach requires that there are sufficient opportunities for the next generation of new tree seedlings to become established through periodic selective felling and via reduction in rhododendron cover, both of which can significantly suppress the growth of the tree seedlings due to lack of light. Creating a mixed age woodland through continuous cover forestry will be beneficial to wildlife by increasing the structural diversity.

Fox Hill Woods also includes a public right of way and we are planning to construct the middle section of the Route B Greenway through this land, which would upgrade the current public rights of way.

In addition to this, a number of Bridleways and Footpaths have been claimed over the area and we are currently in the process of investigating these claims and the evidence that has been supplied.

Supplementary Question:
Wokingham Borough Council policy for the ongoing maintenance of Council trees from February 2017 states that the Council will aim to ensure that each Council owned woodland has an uptodate management plan and that the Council will encourage community involvement with woodland management. The group that I am representing, Friends of Foxhill; we have a working group and we need someone in the Council to support us in achieving these aims without conflicting with planning policy and TPOs. Please will the responsible Executive Member arrange this?

Supplementary Answer:
I will certainly do that and I am very pleased to hear what you are doing. It is absolutely commendable, and I will speak to you offline and recommend an in.

9.2 Morag Malvern asked the Leader of the Council the following question. Due to her inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question
With the recent investment in Denmark Street, what steps are being taken to encourage the Police to return to Wokingham's town centre?

Answer
Thames Valley Police are working closely with Wokingham Borough Council as an active member of the Community Safety Partnership. Whilst the Police Station located in Denmark Street in Wokingham Town centre closed in 2018, the numbers of Wokingham officers have remained constant. Thames Valley Police were required to find savings of £100 million. Thames Valley Police decided to maintain frontline resources in favour of capital assets and therefore a decision to close the Police Station in Wokingham Town was taken. Despite its closure, the Wokingham Town Neighbourhood Team remain a visible presence in the town. As part of this visibility, the team are leading on a number of projects including Pub Watch and “have your say” resident events.

In addition, the Police also have a touch down centre which is located in a local school. The need for other such facilities to help with overall operational and reassurance role is under regular review. This was last looked into at the end of February 2020 to ensure that decisions on where to locate any new premises is informed through an intelligence and evidence led approach. At present Thames Valley Police’s decision not to occupy and operate from a physical building based in Wokingham Town Centre remains the same.

9.3 Steve Mayers asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Highways and Transport:

Question
As we continue to improve the infrastructure to manage the increasing amount of traffic on our roads due the high number of new houses that have been built, why are we not investing in smart traffic lights that can detect when no cars are coming in one direction and change priority in the direction where cars are waiting? Two examples where this would be of benefit are the junctions of Rectory Road, Milton Road, Shute End and Denmark Street (Tudor House). Also the new junction at St Ann's Manor. Both these areas have red lights stopping traffic when nothing is coming in the opposite direction. When we are being asked to switch off engines when we are in traffic, surely we should be investing in technology that will simply keep traffic flowing when there is no reason to stop it.

Answer
We have actually already embarked on a major investment into intelligent traffic lights in order to deal with congestion and of course pollution. Many of the Borough's traffic signal controlled intersections have already got smart software that is managing signal timings according to variable demand by motor traffic, which is what smart lights do, whilst balancing this with the need to enable safe pedestrian and cyclist use. The new signal controlled junction at St Ann's Manor is already equipped and functioning in this way. When I found out about the issue at St Ann's, I asked the highways guys to investigate, and they discovered that the timing was out. That has now been fixed and I believe that the St Ann's traffic lights are now behaving in a more intelligent way than they were before. If you have got any other traffic lights that you think are not working, then please do let me know and I would be very happy to chase them up and get them sorted out for you.

Supplementary Question:
The ones at Tudor House are probably the biggest bugbear at the moment.

Supplementary Answer:
Thank you Mr Mayers, we will make a note of these and get someone to take a look at them.

9.4 Ella Wölfel asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question. Due to her inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question
In a past meeting, the Council took a large step towards a greener more sustainable future by introducing a climate agenda. Naturally, this is just a start and much more needs to be done as the current plan has many faults. To improve this, it has to be a cross-party plan and so my question is: what have you done to ensure that all parties agree with the agenda (taking into account that in the last meeting Labour voted the plan down due to it being a one-party decision)?

Answer
Thank you for your question. As you point out, the Climate Emergency Working Group has been established to provide a high-level steer on policy direction in relation to carbon reduction within the Borough. It is important for the achievement of the commitment to

become a net-zero carbon emissions Borough by 2030, that all interested parties be involved in the process for shaping and developing the action plan.

Understandably, the last few months have been unsettling for the Council operations, having to cope with alternative ways of working to ensure our residents receive the services and support required during such a critical time. Hence, in order to free up officer time for dealing with the Covid crisis, supporting colleagues who are dealing with the crisis, and to plan our recovery post Covid 19, a decision was taken to postpone all non-critical meetings until further notice.

We continue to work on the development of our detailed climate emergency action plan, which will be presented to Council in July 2020. For this, we regularly consult with officers across the Council; liaise with the Town and Parish Councils and more recently presented a progress report to a Task and Finish Group, formed by Members from all parties. Our communication channels used to engage residents, local businesses and children, remain open and are frequently used. We often receive questions and opinions from our residents and keep feeding into the climate emergency action plan, the ideas and suggestions generously offered.

We hope to resume the cross party working group meetings, as we value the collaborative approach from the Members. In the meanwhile, we encourage you to share with us your contribution to the climate emergency agenda using alternative ways as we have undertaken over the last few months.

9.5 Lizzie Bishop asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question
My question is for Councillor John Halsall. Councillor Halsall, you kindly committed last year that you would support an LGBT Pride event in Wokingham in 2020, and you reaffirmed that commitment in the last Full Council meeting. When the rainbow flag was flown last year, many residents and businesses in the town centre responded with enthusiasm, and with their own gestures of support. Even in the current very difficult circumstances, we are hoping to build on this in 2020. During the week leading up to 11th July 2020, we are hoping that residents will look to find ways of building greater mutual understanding, respect for differences, and friendship between residents.

I am aware that no Council funding is available, and that all events must be safe, but in this spirit of building understanding, respect and friendship, could you please tell us what support the Council will be giving to Wokingham Pride in 2020?

Answer
Thank you for your question. I did indeed agree to support the pride event in Wokingham and reaffirmed this at Full Council. I strongly believe that we should all do what we can to understand and respect our differences and through this, we can forge stronger, safer and collective communities working for each other and supporting each other. This not only applies to the LGBT campaign for equality but also every part of the community, including the BME community.

Wokingham Borough Council's DNA is hardwired to treat everybody equitably, fairly and without discrimination. We with our partners, such as the BME Forum, recognise that we can do better and we are committed to doing so. Just to make it clear whilst you are on the line, we cannot support the BLM movement, as it has become a political organisation.

The Council should not be a political football or used inadvertently or advertently for political motives. Regrettably, in the US, the message has become an anti-police message and whilst this may or may not be appropriate there; we cannot associate with such a message in Wokingham.

However, I welcome playing my part in full with working with the LGBT community to ensure that all human beings should be able to have the same opportunities and be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of race, sexual orientation or colour of skin.

As for the specific Pride event, I can confirm the Council will be raising the Flag in support and publicising it on our Website. I will also be wearing the badge, whatever it might be, to show my personal support and will be present at the march, assuming I can be, or clapping from the sidelines in whatever way is permissible under the social distancing guidelines in place at the time, or wherever I can be of support. I think at a time when we have all had a sort of restricted existence such a march or festival could be fun and bring colour to the lives of our residents. Good luck and you have my support.

Supplementary Question:
It is really appreciated, the thought you have put in to it. We understand the situation and everything. I am just wondering if it is possible for the Council to agree to look at maybe how the Council can support equality initiatives for its workforce, or encourage Council run facilities like libraries to consider appropriate ways of marketing the Pride and the week itself, by finding practical ways to educate on LGBT issues and stuff like that?

Supplementary Answer:
As I said in my reply to you, we are committed to equalities and diversity, and I shall do what I can to help foster that throughout the Council.

9.6 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question
As a local Earley resident, I have noticed the very poor structural condition of the footbridge that carries the bridleway over the railway line at Earley station and the A3290. What are the plans for repair or replacement of this bridge?

Answer
This bridge has been identified for replacement and capital funding has been allocated to enable this. Our highways team are in the process of undertaking the design for a new bridge and starting negotiations and agreements with Network Rail, as any works to repair or replace a bridge over the railway will need the rail line to be closed for a period. In the meantime, our engineers have increased the frequency of inspections to ensure we are able to keep the bridge safe and open while we prepare to replace the bridge. So, it is in progress at the moment.

Supplementary Question:
There is currently no disabled access on to the Earley railway station for the London bound platform. It would be very easy if you are replacing the bridge to put in such access, so my supplementary question is can you install such access at the same time as the planned closure of the railway line when you have to put in bridges for the northern distribution road bridge at Winnersh? That would save on the disruption and the cost presumably to Network Rail.

Supplementary Answer:
The current position with Earley station is that you have to go to a different station to get off and go back. We are looking at the moment at providing disabled access to Winnersh Triangle, and I will certainly take the proposal about Earley station back as well, and get somebody to look at it to see if it is cost effective.

9.7 Alex Cran asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question
One small positive to come out of lock down has been seeing the huge numbers of people of all ages out cycling, walking and running on the quieter, cleaner and less congested roads.

It is great that in the past the Council has committed to active transport as shown by the ongoing completion of the Borough's section of the Newbury to Windsor cycle route.

Increasing levels of walking and cycling can help the Council meet its commitment to go carbon neutral by 2030 as well as keeping it at the top of the healthiest and best places to live in the UK not to mention boosting local economies and reducing traffic congestion and travel times for those driving or travelling by bus.

In view of this, what specific plans does the Council have to nurture the recent enthusiasm for cycling and walking?

Answer
I have noticed a lot more people out on bicycles going past my house since the lockdown, which is great to see. The Department for Transport have made £225m available for active travel measures to support recovery from the current crisis; for Wokingham Borough this means we could qualify for up to £759k. There are plans for temporary measures around Wokingham Town Centre which will help visitors maintain social distance, which I think you may have seen going in the past couple of days and encourage walking and cycling into and around the town. I would like to make as many of the things that we are doing to help cyclists and walkers, permanent, rather than temporary. I am very interested in seeing how the changes work so we can work out how we balance the needs of motorists with the needs of people who are walking and cycling.

These works are likely to utilise the first tranche of funding which is £152k which has been allocated to us. There is then going to be an ongoing opportunity for us to receive a second tranche of up to £607k later in the year. We need to move quickly to deliver the initial works and demonstrate to DfT that we can deliver in the short timescales in order to qualify for this second tranche of funding so our main focus has been on this to date; because of the timescales we are unable to consult in the usual way, but we will be seeking feedback as the changes are rolled out. Officers have been discussing a number of other plans for the next tranche of funding as well as considering ideas put forward by the public, businesses and elected Members to help pedestrians and cyclists across the Borough, and are open to any other suggestions.

You may be aware that Wokingham Town Centre has been the focus of one of the DfT's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan pilot projects. We intend to complete this for the Town Centre and then roll it out across the Borough so that eventually the whole Borough will benefit from a plan for walking and cycling forming a cohesive network based on evidence to ensure that the greatest benefit is achieved from our physical measures.

This will form part of the new Local Transport Plan (LTP4) when it is produced next year.

10. PETITIONS

There were no petitions received.

11. MAYOR'S OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Mayor's or Head of Paid Service's announcements.

12. STATEMENTS FROM THE LEADER OF COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

John Halsall, Leader of the Council:

The tragic death of George Floyd has once again raised the inequality and injustice that exists in society. Wokingham Borough Council's DNA is hard wired to treat everyone equitably, fairly and without discrimination. We and the BME Forum recognise that we can do better; we are committed to doing so.

I am not making any changes to my Executive nor their portfolios. You, Mr Mayor, can no longer be a Deputy Executive Member. I will not fill the vacant Deputy Executive Member roles for Highways and Transport and Planning and Enforcement; I will deputise for these areas myself, and that will be included within my specific areas of responsibility within the Constitution together with responsibility for personnel, equalities and diversity.

During the emergency, Susan and I have led the Council with great pride - All the Borough Councillors, the Executive, Directors, officers, charities, partners, volunteers and residents have excelled. I am grateful to all of you. You have made this Borough an exemplar of good practise. We will build on this fantastic work to develop our communities and neighbourhoods, and to pursue our Council Plan published earlier this year.

Charles Margetts, Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services:

Coronavirus has caused significant problems in our care homes. In February, this year central government advised all Councils that it required us to implement a discharge from hospital to care homes 7 days a week, within 2 hours. It became clear to us in April that we had a developing problem with suspected outbreaks in our care homes. Almost every outbreak was shown to be linked to discharges from the Royal Berkshire Hospital. We lobbied our MP's to help resolve the situation. However, it became clear that their efforts were not bringing success. Therefore, we took the unprecedented step of refusing discharges from the Royal Berkshire Hospital until we could be certain that our care homes were safe. Our infection control teams have now visited all of the relevant care homes and all of the required testing is in place. I am pleased to report that deaths in care homes in Wokingham are now at pre Covid levels. We can say with confidence that our care homes are as safe as they possibly could be. I would like to thank care home staff, our officers and the inspection control team who have worked so hard on this.

The next step for us is to set up track and trace. Responsibility for this process will lie with WBC. We will manage this with a sub group of the Health and Wellbeing Board, which will be chaired by the Leader. More details will be announced publicly, shortly.

I would also like to thank the many officers and volunteers who worked so hard on the community response in the Borough. I would finally like to reassure all of our residents that we will continue to support all of those who need our help as long as this crisis lasts.

UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children's Services:
This has been an important year for Children's Services. Under our new leadership team with Carol Cammiss at the helm, robust self evaluation of services was undertaken and later the formal inspections helped us to confirm that our self evaluation was right. We have approved a funding package for Children's Services which will enable continuation of the improvement programme at pace. We are a Council which is ambitious for children and young people in the Borough and we are clear that our intention is for our social care and early help services to be judged a minimum of 'Good' in Ofsted terms. Last year Ofsted told us that we require improvement to be 'Good'. Now we are well on the way to being firmly 'Good.' I am proud to say that our children who are supported through Education, Health and Care Plans, are receiving a better service with 95% of needs assessments now completed within statutory timescales. In conclusion, we understand the challenges. We know what we need to do and we are optimistic for the future of Children's Services in Wokingham.

Parry Batth, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure:
During these unprecedented times, we have maintained 100% weekly waste collection where others have failed. We have reopened our car parks in our country parks allowing our residents to enjoy their health and wellbeing and the fresh air. We have reopened our home waste recycling centres to combat fly tipping, whilst maintaining social distancing and to protect our residents and our staff. We have maintained our grass cutting and street cleaning schedules. We have been providing an online library service to all our residents. Finally, we are preparing ourselves to open our leisure centres as soon as possible, as soon as we get the green light from central government. Mr Mayor, all of these achievements would not have been possible without the fantastic dedication of our contractors and officers, so a big thank you to all our contractors and officers. I would like to extend my thanks to our residents for behaving so responsibly in coping with the social distancing that the pandemic has imposed on us all.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Executive Member for Regeneration:
This week it gives me great pleasure to announce that Wokingham Borough is once again open for business. These past weeks and months have been incredibly difficult for our businesses, restaurants and residents all over the Borough, so I am delighted that yesterday we were at last able to open our non-essential shops. We want to see people back in town, staying safe and shopping locally, helping our Borough's businesses get back on their feet. Businesses are not the only ones on their feet. We have made it easier for pedestrians to navigate our pavements more safely, by narrowing roadways and installing temporary crossings.

During lockdown, the old Carnival Pool has also been demolished and it is full steam ahead for delivering the brand new leisure centre, pool and library that our residents demand and deserve. Our regeneration is regenerating. Builders are building again at Elms Field, with social distancing, and it is very near to completion. Many new retailers are on the cusp of opening. Another tenant exchanged just this week and more are queuing up around the block. This demonstrates the continued confidence in the town and in our Borough.

Stuart Munro, Executive Member Business and Economic Development:
We have one of the first discretionary grants schemes under the Covid, formally approved, which I think is really good. That picks up the bits that fell through and we have established stronger links and relationships with our businesses throughout the payment of grants and welfare contacts. We will build on this to do what we can do to help with the

recovery of our local economy. In summary 1,329 businesses have been paid a government support grant under these schemes. 85% of the government grant money has been distributed. 153 businesses have applied for the discretionary grant and a large proportion of those have been processed. The investment portfolio is holding up well, with some deals under review.

Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Climate Emergency:
We have spent the last 12 months consulting, considering, and devising our Climate Emergency Action Plan. Over the next 12 months, we will begin the delivery of an ambitious programme, focused on significantly reducing our carbon footprint. During the next year, I expect to present to the Executive, a plan that will make the new Dinton Pastures activity centre 130% carbon neutral. I will also be presenting plans to establish a community energy fund, a Borough wide electric vehicle charging strategy and a plan to create a Wokingham Borough Council electric car club. For our schools we will be rescheduling the postponed Climate Conference and aim to trial an innovative green behaviours initiative. We will be supporting our Town and Parish Council initiatives, having circulated and published their carbon footprint. We will be re-proposing the Motion to eliminate non-essential single use plastics from Council operation, presenting a plan to improve our customer services operation and work to increase the distribution of our recently relaunched Wokingham Connect communications.

John Kaiser, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing:
On the financial front, there is no doubt we have and continue to supply the money which has oiled the machine which has allowed excellent work by the volunteers and staff of the Council, and far beyond into care homes, schools, paying for PPE, food and all manner of care and support for residents across the Borough. We went in to the pandemic with excellent cash reserves, due to years of excellent Conservative cash management and we will no doubt come out still with reserves, but much depleted. That said reserves are there to support the Borough in times of need and hardship. I would suggest that if any Member here looks at the havoc wrecked by the pandemic, not just in Wokingham, or even the UK, but worldwide, and not just the economic damage but the personal sorrow, and think about those who have died before their time and their families facing uncertain times. So, yes, we have spent the money, but only the money we could afford and was necessary to ease the suffering and uncertainty of our residents. Would I do it again? Yes, 100%.

Lindsay Ferris, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group:
We would like to start on a positive note by thanking all the officers, fellow councillors of all persuasions, local residents, schools, businesses, and other organisations, who have helped with the Community Hub based at St Crispin's School. This has been invaluable work by all involved. Another achievement that the Council deserves praise for is the work done in developing a social services protocol to prevent patients from being discharged from our local hospitals into care homes, until it was clear that they did not have this dreadful virus. This action, in our view, saved many lives and should be applauded. We understand that other councils across the country have now followed suit, but Wokingham Borough Council took a lead on this and action was taken nearly a fortnight before the Government acted. We would also like to thank senior officers and the Leader of the Council for providing detailed briefings over the last 12 weeks.

We now turn to the functions of the Council. The Liberal Democrat Group has had concerns about the lack of democracy these last few weeks and it has taken a lot of lobbying to get where we are tonight, as initially this, and another Full Council meeting had

just been cancelled. Also, if we were in control of this Council all Committees would have had the ability to vote for their own Chairs and Vice Chairs.

I now turn to my Group's greatest concern, namely the financial position that the Council will find itself within the next 6 to 12 months. We appreciate that the Council will be experiencing a significant drop in revenue together with increasing costs in other areas as a result of the pandemic. However, we have been warning the ruling Conservative group since 2017 about the levels of borrowing and debt that this Council has been racking up. Back then, the debt was around £350million, but now 3 years later this figure has risen to close to £700million . The Council has signed contracts committing it to paying out irrespectively even in the circumstances which have now transpired, where the projected income to cover the cost committed to, may either be delayed or significantly reduced, leaving the Council short of money. This foolhardy action is likely to have exposed the Council to some very serious, future financial problems. As a result of our warnings about this financial mismanagement, having been totally ignored, the Council now has a lot less resilience to bounce back from the challenges presented by this pandemic. We are concerned that cuts in services may have to be made just at a time when they are needed more than ever. We can see the finances of this Council being stretched week by week as this crisis continues. We on this side will at the same time as giving credit where credit is due, will continue holding this Conservative administration to account.

13. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

13.1 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

Why has Wokingham Borough Council not eliminated the use of non-essential single use plastics from Shute End and all Council controlled environments?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council has been proactively working to eliminate the use of single-use plastics where it is not essential. From January 2020, we removed single-use coffee and water cups from our drink dispensing machines in the Shute End Council Office and Wokingham Town Centre Library. In the public areas of the building, plastic cups have been replaced by biodegradable paper cups. Our café has moved to biodegradable materials from single-use plastic packaging since December 2019. As hosts, we endeavour to reduce the amount of single-use plastic products used in meetings and use washable and reusable cups.

We recognise that a large proportion of the challenge is changing the mind-set of staff when it comes to eliminating a material we have become so reliant upon. We removed the number of bins around the offices and created waste and recycling points to encourage people to think twice about what they throw away. With the support or our Green Team, the Council launched an internal sustainability campaign in March 2020, aimed at encouraging behaviour change, to 'encourage staff' as far as possible to stop single-use plastic.

We seek to set an example for businesses, schools, and residents in the Borough to follow. By engaging with partners, we can achieve great impact. For example, working

with one of our service providers, Cater Link, the Council has reduced the use of single-use plastics from the catering services in 34 schools across the Borough. School kitchens have benefited from no cling film pledges, removal of plastic cups, straws, bottles, crudities tubs, and the introduction of reusable plastic pots and containers and fully recyclable packaging materials. Kitchen staff are also encouraged, where possible, to reuse plastic containers from delivered goods.

Regarding our waste collection services, we use blue bags for household waste and the caddie bags for food waste, which are both polyethylene, and for single-use.

Whilst the blue bags are single-use plastic, they act to reduce residual waste and drive up recycling as we restrict them to 80 per 80 litre bags per annum and encourage residents to return unused bags to our Libraries and community hubs. The Council has now established a weekly food waste service available to all of our residents, which has resulted in a reduction of 5,000 tonnes going into general waste this year.

The Council encourages residents to use different methods, such as newspaper, bread or vegetable bags for the kitchen caddies instead of single-use plastic bags. A large majority of our residents, who are also trying to eliminate single-use plastics from their lives, support this.

Supplementary Question:
In September 2019 Gregor, you put forward a Motion to eliminate single use plastics. You put the same Motion through in January 2020. You have just said in reply to Ella's question I think, that you will put forward the same Motion again in a future Council meeting, but at the same time you have reeled off a list of examples where you are saying that the Borough Council has eliminated the use of single use plastics. Forgive me, it does not seem like we know what we are doing. We either have or we have not eliminated it. My question is, is the role of the Executive to execute actions. If the Executive is serious about eliminating the use of single use plastics, why do we not just get on with it rather than bringing Motion after Motion to the Council?

Supplementary Answer:
It is a fair challenge Andy. I think what you can see from the actions that have been taken is that we are just getting on with it, and despite Full Council not getting around to the Motions, which is something that I have found very frustrating as I have wanted it to be debated in the Chamber and to have that discussion amongst all of the Members, we have still got on with the job of removing single use plastics from our Council business and from our controlled environment. I think you have actually made my point for me, which is that we have just gotten on with it, and I still want to put the Motion through to Council because I think it is a statement of intent to say not only are we removing them but we do not want them going forward.

13.2 Daniel Sargeant had asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting

13.3 Alison Swaddle had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.4 Pauline Helliar-Symons had asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting:

13.5 Michael Firmager had asked the Executive Member for Regeneration a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.6 Abdul Loyes had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.7 Graham Howe had asked the Leader of the Council a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting:

13.8 Jenny Cheng had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.9 Barrie Patman had asked the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.10 Chris Bowring had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.11 Guy Grandison had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

13.12 Dianne King had asked the Executive Member for Regeneration a question but this was subsequently withdrawn at the meeting.

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

Question
I have been pressing the Council for some time now to set up a map of Wokingham showing virus case locations Borough wide. As the number is in the vicinity of about 600 it should not be an onerous task.

With no Council staff on furlough and all the Offices closed to the public, the Council should have enough staff to carry out such a task. The data gathered would highlight potential Covid 9 clusters in the Borough. It would then be very easy to continually update as circumstances change and the benefits to residents and their health/wellbeing goes without saying

Would the Leader of the Council agree with me that such a proactive approach would by getting us on the front foot for track and trace be of real benefit to all our residents?

Answer
At the moment we do not receive the postcode data of confirmed COVID-19 cases or deaths.

We do have access to data about Covid 19 cases, deaths, care home and school outbreaks for Wokingham residents, from Public Health England, the Office for National Statistics and CQC. We collate all of these and develop a public report weekly for Members and the public. This is on the Wokingham website.

We are starting to receive information from the NHS test and trace service, but not with postcodes, so we are unable to map the locations at the moment. We are expecting to receive more local data so we can monitor local outbreaks but there is no date for this yet.

The Public Health England regional oversight group is monitoring “hot spots” or potential outbreaks, and notifying the Council immediately through Public Health so we can take the appropriate action.

Council staff have been deployed to support local outbreak planning in liaison with public health colleagues across Berkshire.

So the answer to your question in essence is, we might wish to but we cannot at the moment. My understanding is that one of the issues with the app is GDPR and we would have to overcome that as well.

Supplementary Question:
Basically as the Government’s track and trace programme is an unmitigated disaster what we can do in the Council ourselves would be beneficial to our residents. I welcome the comments made by Charles on this exact point, but if you want to follow Charles’ exact direction which is to go down track and trace, you will need far more information. I welcome anything that will benefit our residents. I hope you would agree with that?

Supplementary Answer:
I cannot but agree. We are working very hard to put an effective system of track and trace in the Borough, for which we will have ultimate responsibility, but at the moment it is not quite clear what the design of that system is, or should be.

14. POLITICAL BALANCE OF THE COUNCIL AND ALLOCATION AND APPOINTMENT TO SEATS ON COMMITTEES AND BOARDS

The Council considered a report on the political balance of the Council and the appointment to the Council’s Committees and Boards, in accordance with the wishes of Groups, and the appointment of some of the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen as detailed in Appendix 1A of the report.

The report set out a number of recommendations which Members were asked to consider.

It was proposed by Councillor John Halsall and seconded by Councillor John Kaiser that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

Councillor Andy Croy commented that he believed that all Committees should be able to elect their own Chairman and Vice Chairman and requested that recommendation 5 around the appointment of the Chairman and Vice Chairman be voted on separately. This was agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That:

1) having reviewed the representation of the political groups on the Council, confirms that it has 31 Conservative Group Members, 15 Liberal Democrat Group Members, 4 Labour Group Members, 3 Independent Group Members and one vacancy (as set out in Para 1.1);

2) the appointment and composition of Committees and Boards as set out in Para 2.1 of the report be approved;
3) the allocation of seats on Committees and Boards on the basis that, of the 92 seats (as set out in Para 3.6), 54 be allocated to the Conservative Group 26 be allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group, 7 be allocated to the Labour Group and 5 be allocated to the Independent Group, be approved;
4) the proposals submitted by the respective Group Leaders and that those Members be appointed to the Committees and Boards as set out in Appendix 1, be approved;
5) the second part of procedure rule 4.2.1.1r) and procedure rule 4.2.26 be suspended and for the 2020/21 Municipal Year only the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of those Council Committees etc, set out in Appendix 1A be appointed as stated, be agreed;
6) the principles of proportionality be applied when Members are appointed to Sub Committees, Panels or Working Groups, be agreed;
7) the appointment of the Independent Persons to assist the work of the Standards Committee and the co-opted Parish/Town Council Representatives as set out in Appendix 1, be noted;
8) the elected Member representatives on the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board, as set out in Appendix 1, as nominated by the Leader of Council in accordance with Section 194 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, be noted.

15. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

At this point in the meeting, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 9.00pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Councillor Malcolm Richards and seconded by Councillor John Halsall.

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

16. APPOINTMENT TO PANELS/WORKING GROUPS ETC

Members were asked to refer to a list of nominations to various Panels, Working Groups, Joint Committees and various bodies.

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

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Members be appointed to the Council's Panels, Working Groups, Joint Committees and Various Bodies as set out in Appendix 2 to the Minutes.

17. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Members were asked to refer to a list of nominations to various Outside Bodies.

The Mayor indicated that Councillor John Halsall would replace Councillor John Kaiser as one of the Conservative nominations for the Local Government Association (LGA) General Assembly and that the Liberal Democrats had nominated Councillor Paul Fishwick for the Mid & West Berks Local Countryside Access Forum.

Councillor Andy Croy expressed disappointment that none of the Labour Group's suggestions around ensuring that those Members appointed to outside bodies would be the best fit for the individual organisation, had been taken up. He referred to the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative and indicated that three of the Labour Group represented this area. In addition, he referred to Councillor Boyt's long-standing links with

the Wokingham Waterside Centre. Councillor Chris Smith indicated that he had been undertaking a lot of work with the Wokingham Waterside Centre particularly during the pandemic and wished to continue this.

Councillor Richard Dolinski indicated that he too had raised the matter of ensuring that Members were a good fit for the particular outside bodies.

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

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Members be appointed to the Outside Bodies as set out in Appendix 3 to the Minutes.

Appendices - Committee, Boards and Outside Bodies

18. OUTCOME OF CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT

It was proposed by Councillor John Kaiser and seconded by Councillor Chris Bowring that it be noted that Councillor John Halsall had been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That it be noted that Councillor John Halsall had been found to be in breach of the Member Code of Conduct.

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