

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.20 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 Helliard-Symons, Emma Hobbs, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Dianne King, Abdul Loyes, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Adrian Mather, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachele Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane and Alison Swaddle

54. MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Mayor informed Council that Frank Browne, who was the Leader of Council between 2002-2008, and Helen Power who was elected to the Council in 2018 but had had to step down in 2019 due to ill health, had both passed away recently. Stephen Conway and Pauline Jorgensen paid tribute to Frank Browne and Helen Power and a Minute's silence was held.

55. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from John Kaiser, Simon Weeks and Oliver Whittle.

56. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 23 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendment and will be signed by the Mayor at a future date.

Jim Frewin commented that with regards to the change to the polling district in Shinfield South item, he had raised concerns that it was the first time that he had heard of it, and that he had made a request for the Ward councillors to work more closely together irrespective of political party.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Emma Hobbs declared a Personal Interest in Item 60.1, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that she had been invited to join the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Andy Croy declared a Personal Interest in Item 60.1, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that his mother was campaign manager at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Maria Gee declared a Personal Interest in Item 60.1, Motion on the Council Tax Protocol, on the grounds that she was a Trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau. She indicated that she would not participate in the debate of the Motion or vote on this Motion.

58. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed Members that he had undertaken a number of face-to-face Mayoral engagements, adhering to the Government guidance around Covid 19 as he did so.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

59.1 Peter Humphreys asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

The pedestrian controlled traffic lights in Wiltshire Road were recently replaced on an almost like-for-like basis bar two features. One was low energy bulbs; the other was the addition of a proximity sensor. Fomites are a significant factor in the spread of Covid-19 so anything that obviates the need to push a button to stop the traffic is obviously a good idea. But the Council's Highway's Department disagree for although paying for this potentially life-saving feature they are refusing to activate it, forcing pedestrians to touch a potentially infected button.

The Executive Member for Highways is fully aware of this and had chosen to support the bizarre policy decision. Would she please explain why her Department won't use the sensors which taxpayer's money have funded, the consequence of which is promoting the spread of the disease?

Answer

The pedestrian controlled traffic lights in Wiltshire Road were recently upgraded to utilise low energy lamps, pedestrian detection equipment and a new traffic signal controller containing improved communication and management software. The detection equipment is in place and functioning, so as to extend the green man phase when slower walkers or groups of pedestrians are crossing the road and a longer stage is required.

The Council did not, however, introduce measures that removed the need for push button demand for crossing completely, since the need for this facility to be retained was considered to be greater at that time and a review of the potential for this measure was scheduled to follow the introduction of more permanent active travel measures to support walking and cycling.

However, as a result of the gradual removal of Covid-supporting measures in the town centre the need for automatic detection remains low. The use of a push button to call the pedestrian stage at a crossing is deemed to create no greater health hazard for pedestrians than their use of cashpoint machines in banks, payment machines in shops and door handles to public buildings, all of which members of the public are faced with using when visiting the town and for which their personal hygiene and Covid prevention actions should provide sufficient protection.

I should also point out that the June 2020 European Centre for Disease Control report on Covid transmission, which said that indirect transmission from fomites, which is things such as crossings, is considered possible but so far no occurrences have been documented. Handwashing I would say remains the best solution. The only way you can get Covid through touching things is if you then touch your mouth, nose or eyes. It is not transmitted through the skin.

We will review this decision should there be any deterioration in the Covid situation that would require such measures to be introduced in line with government guidance.

Supplementary Question:

As we know from the media, there are different views on science and it is never black and white. For instance, the prestigious journal the New England Medical Journal, has said that fomites can be a problem, and hence that it is why you if you go for example, down to a supermarket, they spray all the trolleys that you are going to touch, and other surfaces. That is why when I go to my physiotherapist; they have a 10 minute gap between appointments so that they can spray everything possible that the last person may have touched to prevent disease. In the well-known phrase 'every little helps' why is the Council refusing to actually activate this facility, that they paid for, and it just seems ridiculous that you are not willing to help. We are never going to prove where an infection comes from but surely, you should have it on your conscience to try and prevent infections, so why will you not do it?

Supplementary Answer:

We will follow the government guidance and we will follow the professional advice from the Disease Control people, and the information at the moment is that what we are doing is quite sufficient.

60. PETITIONS

The following Member presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

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

Sarah Kerr	Sarah Kerr presented a petition containing 47 signatures relating to the installation of a pedestrian crossing on Barkham Road. <i>To be passed to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i>
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61. TENANTS' CHARTER - MODERNISING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - 1 YEAR ON UPDATE REPORT

The Council considered an update report on progress over the past year towards achieving the aspirations of the Tenants' Charter.

The report emphasised the importance of the Council and tenants working in partnership to modernise housing services over the next decade. This would deliver improved satisfaction levels, increase efficiency and support the Council's aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Steve Bowers, Chairperson of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, thanked the involved tenants, the members of the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel (TLIP), the Housing team and all Councillors, for their work and support.

He indicated that the lockdown had expedited the tenants and involved tenants move online. It had not been possible to run community fun days this year due to the Covid restrictions, however, 7 community fun days had been held the previous year, which had been very well attended. In future, the AGM would be held at a community fun day in order to better publicise it and to boost attendance.

Andrew Mickleburgh was pleased that the report acknowledged the Borough's ageing tenant population, and questioned how work around adaptations could be further improved. Steve Bowers commented that strides were already being made in this area.

Daniel Sargeant congratulated TLIP on their work and commented that Wokingham Housing Limited, of which he was a Non-Executive Director, were keen to work with them.

Prue Bray supported the Charter and thanked the involved tenants, who had been a pleasure to work with.

Jim Frewin commented that the report was very readable and that he felt that some of the strategies, particularly customer service and some of the technology strategies, should be adopted in the Council's wider customer experience.

John Halsall thanked the tenants for the support they gave the Council. He commented that the Council was committed to increasing its social and Council homes within the Borough.

Bill Soane indicated that he attended some of the community fun days whilst he had been Mayor the previous year, and thanked the tenants for making him feel welcome.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Daniel Sargeant that the recommendations within the report be approved.

On being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update report be noted and that the Council continue to work in partnership with tenants in order to achieve the aspirations in the Tenants Charter;
- 2) a further review of progress relating to the Tenants' Charter be carried out in 2021.

62. TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN 2019-20

The Council considered the Treasury Management Outturn report for the 2019/20 financial year.

The report summarised the treasury management operations carried out during 2019/2020. It was presented for the purpose of monitoring and review, in accordance with the Council's treasury management practices. The report stated that the Council adhered to all agreed prudential indicators during 2019/2020. This included ensuring the necessary liquidity to deliver on the day to day operations of the Council.

Daniel Sargeant thanked the Finance Team for all their work. He commented that external borrowing had risen as planned as the Council invested further in its ambitious long-term capital programme. The investment properties had delivered a return of 5.11%, creating additional revenue.

Rachel Burgess commented that whilst the document was essentially backward looking, one of the key graphs within the report, the borrowing versus assets value graph (Table 2), was forward looking. The figures were based on the Medium Term Financial Plan and suggested that the debt levels were reducing as asset levels were retained at a constant

level from 2023/24 onwards. She expressed surprise that no reference had been made to the potential impact of Covid and the impact that this would have, for example, on asset forecasts. In addition, she felt that the presentation of the expenditure of £5million last year on climate emergency was potentially misleading, and that much of this expenditure had been rebadged from other budgets.

Clive Jones reiterated the concerns that the Liberal Democrat Group had about the Council's rising debt levels and emphasised that levels had risen considerably over time. He stated that Covid 19 would have a major impact on the Council's finances and reserves.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey felt that the report was misleading and did not address the potential impact of Covid 19 on capital projects and property values.

Stuart Munro indicated that the Property Investment Strategy had been presented and explained to Overview and Scrutiny.

Daniel Sargeant explained that the Treasury Management Outturn report was a backwards looking document and whilst he appreciated that Covid 19 would greatly impact on the Council's finances, it was not the most appropriate document to reference this.

It was proposed by Daniel Sargeant and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendations be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED That it be noted that:

- 1) the Treasury Management Outturn report was presented to Audit Committee on 29th July 2020;
- 2) the managed repayment of debt over time, which illustrates the increased borrowing required to fund key Council priorities which in turn generate income streams (to repay debt) and provides revenue funding for vital statutory services (as set out in the graph in Table 2 of the report);
- 3) the asset value created through the Council's capital investments compared to the debt required to generate the asset value (as set out in the graph in Table 2 of the report);
- 4) the capital investments made in the Council's priorities for its community, by category (as set out in Table 1 of the report);
- 5) the Treasury Management report in Appendix A, that shows that all approved indicators have been adhered to and that prudent and safe management has been adhered to.

63. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Council considered a report from the Constitution Review Working Group which set out proposed changes to the Constitution. The proposals related to:

- The Petition Protocol – clarifying the process, especially for those creating electronic petitions outside of the Council’s website;
- The Council meeting – timing and order of business (30 minute time limit for business items); Motions without notice; Members’ responses to recorded votes;
- Membership of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board to include the Council’s Chief Executive;
- Anti-fraud and anti-corruption policies, considered by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 29 July 2020.

Stephen Conway was of the view that the recommendation regarding recorded votes was unnecessary.

A number of Members felt that it was important that the Constitution Review Working Group again reviewed the Council meeting process to ensure that more of the Council agenda could be completed at each meeting.

Andy Croy requested that recommendations 1, 3, 5 and 6 be voted on together and that separate votes be held on recommendations 2 and 4.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by Emma Hobbs that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the following changes to the Constitution, as recommended by the Constitution Review Working Group be agreed:

- 1) Section 3.5 Petition Protocol be amended as set out in Appendix 1 of the report and explained in Paragraph 1 of the report;
- 2) Section 4.2.2.1 Timing and Order of Business be amended as set out in Paragraph 3 of the report;
- 3) Section 4.2.12 Motions Without Notice m) be amended as set out in Paragraph 4 of the report;
- 4) Section 4.2.15.5 Recorded Vote be amended as set out in Paragraph 5 of the report;
- 5) Section 4.4.23 Membership [Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board] be amended as set out in Paragraph 6 of the report;
- 6) Chapter 9.4 – Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy, Chapter 9.5 Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance, Chapter 9.6 Anti Bribery Policy, Chapter 9.7 Anti Money Laundering Policy, Chapter 9.8 Prosecution and Sanction Policy and Chapter 9.9 Acquisition of Communications Data and Use of Covert Surveillance and Covert Human Intelligence Sources Policy, be amended as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

64. UPDATE FROM THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Chris Bowring, Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee, addressed the Council on the Committee's review of its rules relating to public participation whilst meetings were held virtually.

Following the 6 July Council meeting, the Planning Committee had undertaken discussions to enable public participation in virtual Planning Committee meetings. Public speaking had been fully integrated into the most recent meeting and those wishing to speak under any of the category of public speaking would be welcome at future Planning Committee meetings.

The possibility of hybrid Planning Committees, if and when government guidance and technical solutions, allowed, was being further explored. He hoped that live streaming of the meetings would be retained in the future so far as possible.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey commented that she was pleased that the public were now able to participate fully in virtual Planning Committees.

Angus Ross felt that it was the best way forwards but that matters should be kept under review.

It was proposed by Chris Bowring and seconded by Angus Ross that the update be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the update from the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee be noted.

65. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

65.1 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Schools in the Borough have been in unprecedented turmoil due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has not been helped by chaotic decision-making by the Government which has resulted in mixed messages and complete changes of mind on when children would be returning to school, what schools should do to accommodate them, and exam results.

This turmoil is likely to continue for some time. We may have future local hot spots which require schools to be closed temporarily for example. Many activities which have previously been taken for granted will be more difficult, more expensive or impossible to deliver, such as school trips, presentation and parents' evenings, fetes and sports days, school plays and concerts. These difficulties even extend to ensuring children can travel to school safely.

We also have to deal with further consequences of what has already happened – children taking public exams next year have had their learning disrupted; those intending to go to university may not have the expected range of places available to them due to this year's students taking up deferred offers, and we have yet to see what the impact of lockdown has been on children's mental health and on other issues which affect them, such as

domestic violence, and families with significantly reduced incomes as a result of job loss or pay reductions.

What is the Council going to do to support schools, staff, pupils and parents during this academic year to minimise the detrimental impact of these issues on them?

Answer

The last academic year has been incredibly challenging for all schools including their staff, students and parents. However, Wokingham has had some of the best performance in respect of maintaining school opening and attendance from March 2020 when schools were asked to close to most students.

We have continued to work with schools and academies throughout the pandemic, providing advice, guidance and support in the light of national guidance as well as local learning. This has included daily communication to all school senior leaders and directors and stakeholders, and bespoke responses where there have been issues or concerns related to potential outbreaks.

We have worked closely with the Department for Education to inform and fully understand national policy in the changing context to which you refer, and we have had a close relationship with Public Health in the development and management of the Outbreak Management Plan, which has specific reference to schools and settings.

Now going forward, we will continue to engage with schools on all coronavirus related issues, and we will be supporting them on the usage of the catch up premium and national tutoring scheme announced by the Government in July. We will be making best use of the additional resources we will be receiving in respect of supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and reorganising service delivery to support children back to school and back to class based learning.

I would like to remind you that in July we started a free online counselling service for 11-18 year olds. It is emotional support through digital counselling and there is no referral, no waiting list. It is open 7 days a week and 365 days a year.

Supplementary Question:

As indicated in the question and in your answer the impact of the pandemic on children's mental health is a big concern. What steps are you taking to make sure that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services have sufficient capacity to meet the likely need?

Supplementary Answer:

As you are aware, when it comes to CAMHS, there is a waiting list and there has always been a waiting list, and it looks as if there will continue to be a waiting list. That is why I am very pleased that we have now this free, online counselling service. We are hoping that this will be something that children and young adults will be using, and of course, should it turn out that this problem is bigger than we have been notified of so far, then we will need to look into further measures to help them.

65.2 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

What will be the effect of the proposed houses in Winnersh Farm from the local plan update and the extra but unmentioned houses at the new SEND school on the traffic

modelling of the new Winnersh Relief Road roundabout?

Answer

The consultation draft of the Local Plan Update (February 2020) proposes the allocation of land at Winnersh Farm for around 250 new homes. The proposed number of new homes was adjusted downwards to account for a potential new SEND school and the traffic it would create. Responses to the draft Local Plan Update are currently being reviewed and analysed.

As part of the preparation of that draft Local Plan Update, a supporting transport assessment was produced and is available on the Councils' website.

The assessment looked at all the junctions across the Borough and how they would be impacted under various development scenarios. The assessment considered both the new homes and the delivery of a SEND school at Winnersh Farms.

The assessment shows that the Woodward Close junction would operate at a level below which its capacity is considered to become a concern.

However, as with all proposed sites in the draft Local Plan Update, the impact and sustainability of any development will be further considered as the Local Plan Update progresses. More detailed assessment would also be required as part of the process for determining any subsequent planning application. This would include using specific 'Junction' software being used.

It is anticipated that a detailed application for the proposed SEND school will be submitted in January 2021. A separate outline planning application for housing on the remaining Council-owned land is likely to be submitted early in 2021 as well.

Supplementary Question:

Since this nearly triples the number of houses coming out of Woodward Close which was definitely not included in this planning, as the planning was all done several years ago and all of the updates for that were done several years ago, it has not been edited at all, what are you planning to do to help?

Supplementary Answer:

I think I have answered that question already Rachele. This is not the end of the process. The junction traffic will be assessed again during the detailed planning application and during the Local Plan update as it progresses, so this is a long view of the position.

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

Winter Maintenance Plan – Under 2.11. The Council does not promote the use of bicycles during periods of prolonged hazardous conditions. With the exception of shared carriageway/cycleway routes on a primary or secondary salting route, shared footway/cycleway and remote cycleway networks are not salted when hard frost, ice or prolonged hazardous conditions are forecast.

With the active travel agenda and more walking and cycling being promoted will WBC be reviewing this policy to add these cycle routes on a priority basis?

Answer:

There is certainly a shift within government and in the transport field towards encouraging more active travel and Wokingham Borough Council has been supportive of this agenda with its programme of Greenways, the A329 cycleway and the work of award winning My Journey team. The Council is in the process of producing a new Local Transport Plan, which will no doubt encompass new active travel measures and an increased reliance on cycling particularly for the movement of people throughout the Borough. We will be reviewing our approach to winter maintenance on cycle routes before this winter in order to identify the key commuting routes that would benefit from being prioritised for winter maintenance. Thank you for raising this issue.

It is worth noting that the Council has already purchased 10 small push along gritters which are capable of undertaking additional gritting in pedestrian areas and cycleways such as outside schools or shopping centres in the event of prolonged bad weather.

Supplementary Question:

If Wokingham Borough Council are really serious about the active travel agenda there is an urgent need to ensure that walking and cycling routes are included at the very first opportunity, so that this sustainable mode of transport will not be lost. Will the Executive Member please confirm that they will definitely be included in the 2020/21 Winter Maintenance Plan?

Supplementary Answer:

I did say that they will be included and we will review the key routes and make sure that they are included.

65.4 Carl Doran asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

On August 27th an article by you, Councillor Halsall, referring to the Government's proposed planning reforms was published on the 'Conservative Home' website.

In the article you say this:

"The Cummings affair, Robert Jenrick, Coronavirus, Scotland and school results have hugely dented us Tories. We will do badly in May unless the Government quickly learns from its mistakes"

Do you think the Government will learn from its mistakes, specifically these planning reforms, which so affect us all?

Answer

As you know the Government is consulting on changes to the planning system and whilst I cannot presume to know how it will respond to the consultation, I would encourage all of you to familiarise yourselves with the consultations and make your views known by: contacting your MP, contacting the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, visiting the Council's website for more information and a copy of the Council's draft response (when available). More information and an online petition is available at www.enough-is-enough.org.uk and taking part in the Government consultation directly.

As you know, I have been actively campaigning against the White Paper and have worked pretty much continuously since early August to advise as many councillors, residents and

MPs, as I possibly could, together with stunts and articles in the media. Residents and councillors' clear support will help me a great deal.

Supplementary Question:

I am definitely opposed to these planning reforms in their entirety. So you spoke to me the other day saying that you had spoken to Conservative Ministers and MPs, and I hope what you heard from them is not 'limited and specific' shall we say. In the same article, you proposed your own manifesto for the planning system, including a bit which I fully agree with – removal of developers' ability to avoid obligation through viability. I wonder if you are aware that a local developer recently received planning permission for a development of 55 one and two bedroom flats in Wokingham town centre, where they pleaded on the basis of viability that they should supply absolutely zero affordable housing. That local developer was Wokingham Borough Council. I think I referred to this decision at Planning Committee as 'morally repugnant.' Will you ensure that this Council sets a clear example, rectifies its mistake, and puts affordable housing in this WBC owned and built development?

Supplementary Answer:

I honestly cannot talk about specific planning applications. First of all I do not know about it in detail and I am not sure at what stage of the process that it is, so it would be wrong for me to do so.

Let me assure you that our Core Strategy, which has now been in existence for 10 years, has a 35% affordable housing requirement. We gave a commitment, this administration, to build social houses, and for want of a better word, council homes. We gave a commitment to build 1000 in 4 years and we look as if we are going to better that. Yes, we are very committed to providing homes which people can afford to buy on their incomes, or rent.

65.5 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question which was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

Our care leavers face significant challenges, currently exacerbated by Covid-19. When they move into their own accommodation and manage their own budget they can often find themselves struggling to cope with personal finances.

Since 2018, Council has been legally obliged to support care leavers to the age of 25. As corporate parents for these care leavers we should all be ensuring they have the same chances as we would want for our own children. Yet, in Wokingham, these same care leavers currently have to pay Council Tax as soon as they turn 21, on top of learning how to manage a household, job, studies and other bills, often without the support of family or other networks.

We know that Council Tax debt can be particularly daunting for care leavers, and can escalate quickly. Contrast this with young people who are not care leavers, who will often have parents to support them, and even house them, so they have no Council Tax to pay.

The cost of exemption is not material for this Council. So, when will Wokingham do the right thing, as many other Councils have done, and make care leavers exempt from paying Council Tax until they turn 25?

Answer

As you will be aware, the Council finds itself in extremely challenging financial circumstances as a result of Covid 19. We already have an in year overspend of approximately £4million and we have considerable financial impact flowing into next year in relation to Covid 19 alone. These include valuable lost income that we need to fund services and higher costs of care arising from isolation and lockdown. Indeed, as I am sure you are aware Councils up and down the country, are having to make some very stark choices.

We will of course continue with our approach during such challenging times of targeting our very limited resources into the areas of most need and in delivering the key priority investments for our community.

On 29th March 2018, it was agreed at the Executive meeting that all Wokingham care leavers up to the age of 21, years would be exempt from Council Tax. Furthermore, I am aware that the Corporate Parenting Board has undertaken work to explore the possibility of extending that exemption up to the age of 25. This proposal would obviously come at a cost and would have to be considered along with all other competing priorities across the Council, in arriving at another balanced budget. This process of setting up next year's MTFP is of course set in a stark financial context as I described earlier. It would therefore be irresponsible of me to make any commitments at this stage.

Supplementary Question:

I obviously understand the impact on the Council's finances at the moment, but the values involved are actually virtually immaterial. It is actually quite a small cohort, but obviously, for those individuals it can be completely life changing. I do not know why we cannot just do the right thing and just do it now. Why is that? Why cannot we just do it now?

Supplementary Answer:

I understand where you are coming from and of course, all the councillors have very serious corporate parenting responsibilities. It is at the front of all our minds, but I think particularly with the financial situation that we are in right now, which is unique, we need to be very disciplined with the finances, make sure we are going through the same robust budgeting process that we always do. Now is not the time to be messing around with that to be honest.

65.6 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

With the problems of social distancing at the Borough Schools, are the free schools' meals provided going to be a hot meal? This is important to the children being provided for by this service.

Answer

At the present time schools are focussing on securing their provision that enables all pupils to make the safest possible return to school. This involves implementing many operational changes including the use of shared spaces and teaching arrangements.

Schools and catering providers are having to get used to the new ways that schools have to operate in, and for some schools having large groups in dining halls is unsafe, and delivering hot meals to classrooms is a health and safety risk.

As a result, schools are in discussion with their catering providers about the most effective way of providing opportunity for pupils to access their school lunches. This may mean at this time that for some schools the offer continues to be a sandwich style option as has been the case throughout the pandemic.

Each school will determine its own arrangements for the provision of school meals, and some choose to purchase through the contract held by the Council with Caterlink. We recognise that for many children, access to a hot meal is important and we are working with Caterlink to ensure a return to hot meal provision as soon as is possible, and not later than October half term.

Supplementary Question:

Do we expect a higher uptake of free school meals due to the economic decline and do we have enough in the budget to cover any increase?

Supplementary Answer:

Normally it is about 7% of children in the Borough who have free school meals and I do not have any information if this has increased or not. I think that the schools have not submitted any information about this to the Council. I will ask tomorrow if we have any information coming in about it or any indication that there will be a higher uptake.

66. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

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

Question:

Councillor Halsall earlier in the meeting challenged the Lib Dem's competence in financial matters when debating treasury management, by them not being able to identify specific areas in the report. Yet in today's Wokingham Paper on page 9, he rightly encourages all of us to join the challenge against 1635 houses a year, this Conservative government proposes for Wokingham, but he fails to give any indication as to what the right number might be for Wokingham. As he well knows, just saying no is not good enough, getting the flagship Grazeley of 15000. Would he be considered just as incompetent on housing as he suggested the Lib Dems are on finances, if he cannot say how many houses a year is right for Wokingham?

Answer:

It was an extraordinary speech which did not contain a coherent question. It appears that the question invites me to state a number. The current number is the one he set in the Core Strategy which has been modified by the change in standard method, which happened in 2018. We had a referendum on housing numbers some time ago and we know that the residents would like less. My view is not dissimilar to Gary's view when he published the Core Strategy.

66.2 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

On 28 August, a cyclist was airlifted to hospital following a serious accident at the Cutbush Lane/Carshalton Way roundabout in Hawkedon ward. For years, numerous requests have been made prior to this latest accident, for safety improvements at this dangerous location. On 3rd and 15th of this month, I emailed officers to ask that this site be visited as a matter

of urgency, and a plan devised to improve safety. You were copied into both emails. I have not received any responses. Could you please commit to getting this matter properly addressed without further delay?

Answer:

I do not respond to emails that I am copied into if they are addressed to somebody else. I let somebody else addressed in the emails to actually respond. However, I have already talked to Highways about this. I investigated some other opportunities for measures to reduce the speed, and I have certainly asked them to have a look at the vegetation sight lines on Cutbush Lane to make sure you can see people coming out of Cutbush Lane and going on to Meldreth and Carshalton. I have taken action but I do not generally respond to emails I am copied into, otherwise I would be sending emails all night.

66.3 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Will she meet with me to discuss how we may progress some ideas I have on highway improvements that will increase public safety at the Twyford Village crossroads?

Answer:

I have already done that once Stephen, I think last year, and I am happy to do so again.

66.4 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Residents on Larch Drive have told me that a number of elderly people have fallen over near the front of the opening of the road because there is a tree there. Its tree roots have buckled the pavement and there have been some really nasty falls there. Can you let me know what the Highways department can do to solve this situation and help the residents?

Answer:

As you say, the tree roots are pushing the tarmac on that side of the path up and making it rather uneven. I have asked the Highways inspectors to go out and look at that site. They went out yesterday and I chased them again today to see if information had come back. I have not got any information back yet but when I do get it, I will let you know.

66.5 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

The A3290 flyover in Culver Lane has long been blighted by graffiti. It is an eyesore but WBC's policy on graffiti allows the graffiti to remain. Recently a resident complained about various offensive words on some of the columns. This resulted in WBC sending out an operative who simply painted over the offending words, leaving the rest of the graffiti in place. The resident is appalled that the rest of the graffiti was ignored and that this opportunity to improve our area was not taken up. I would like to ask on their behalf, how much more would it have cost to do the job properly?

Answer:

I will look at it tomorrow when I speak to Clare Lawrence and her team. I will make sure

something is done about it but I do not know the exact cost but I will find out and get back to you.

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

Question:

Winnersh Meadows Park, which is a Wokingham Borough park. There are two trails that are blocked by fallen trees. I have requested that the trees be removed twice but nothing has been done. The millennium oak has also been cut down and has never been replaced. When are these three things going to be fixed?

Answer:

Once again, I shall be speaking to the officers tomorrow and will get something done about it.

66.7 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Within my ward, Old Forest Road has been closed until spring for the building of the northern distributor road. This has effectively blocked off access to the new park for most of the residents in that area. The only way for residents of Aston Road, Lowther Road, Wayside and Lenham Close, to access the park, is to take a long, circuitous route walking down to Emmbrook Road, Toutley Road, Queens Road, which effectively makes this park inaccessible for many of our residents. Please can we get some support from Wokingham Borough Council with the addition of a pedestrian route across the Emm Brook to allow access to continue during these works?

Answer:

I am happy to work with Parry to see if we can find some sort of solution, bearing in mind how long the roadworks have got to continue for.

66.8 Daniel Sargeant asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

The Jerry Moor Hill area of my ward – residents have raised with me that there are a number of large oak trees which they think are in ill health and posing a safety issue. Officers have been out, checked them over and claimed that all is well. Since then there has been a large bough which has fallen in a play park, which thankfully did not result in any injuries. Can we get a second opinion of officers on these trees particularly the ones near the play park?

Answer:

Thank you for bringing that to my attention. I will be speaking to the Trees department tomorrow. I am very sorry to hear about the unfortunate break of the limb from a tree which has fallen down. That is very unfortunate and I am pleased that no one was hurt, but I will be on to the officers tomorrow to have another inspection because that Jerry Moor Hill was only inspected very recently. We need to be very vigilant and inspect every tree for any other possible loose limbs. From a safety viewpoint, I will be asking them to have another look tomorrow.

66.9 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

Traffic close to the junction of Falstaff Avenue and Harcourt Drive has created a very dangerous situation for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers. Since at least October 2018 Lib Dem councillors have sought to extend yellow lines at this location. Eventually on 11 February, you reviewed and approved an IEMD to introduce parking restrictions in this area. On 23 August, you reported that lines should be painted in the week commencing 31 August. Why have these lines still not been painted and when will this be finally dealt with please?

Answer:

I have been asking exactly the same question myself. We have had a problem with actually getting line-painting gangs out because of Covid. For some reason, although we have managed to get tarmac filling holes, it has been very difficult to get lines painted, but I am already on that case and I have asked the same question myself.

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

Question:

The footbridge beside Earley station is in urgent need of repair. When this happens, and please do not leave it too long so that the footbridge is closed before it is needed, please can you insert a ramped offshute for reaching the London bound platform of Earley station, so that people unable to negotiate stairs due to disabilities or buggies, can access the trains to and from Earley station?

Answer:

I must point out that this is not in your ward. However, I have already talked to the railway about disability access for Earley station. I have talked to them about Earley and Winnersh actually. Winnersh Triangle, the platform is unfortunately not wide enough for wheelchair access, so I have asked them to go away and look and see what they can do at Earley station to improve the disabled access there. I met with them already a few weeks ago and had a good talk about what all the disabled access opportunities were, but Malcolm, I think we should only be asking questions in this time about ward matters.

66.11 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question:

I have logged what I and a number of residents consider to be a number of issues with potholes in Betchworth Avenue in Maiden Erlegh. I was informed that the potholes did not warrant corrective action. I understand that the standards engineers use is the UK Pavement Management System to prioritise maintenance. I accepted their ruling but I did not agree with it so I waited a while, but on recent inspection, several potholes had actually been filled. The entrance to Betchworth Avenue from Wilderness Road is peppered with a series of potholes across both lanes for about 200 yards. I invite you to visit Betchworth Avenue to see for yourself and agree with me that all the potholes need an urgent and immediate repair.

Answer:

I have visited many potholes in my time and I am very happy to go and visit the ones in Betchworth Avenue as well. I would urge anybody that sees potholes, to report them online. We have a new jet patcher, which does temporary repairs, which is actually very effective. That certainly sorts out any safety issues before any proper maintenance can take place, so please put them online and they go straight to Volker and Volker will deal with them quite quickly especially if there is a safety issue.

66.12 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:**Question:**

Emmbrook residents, including myself, overturned Townhouse crossing since 2016. The current bridge is an eyesore and cannot be used by anybody with a pram, wheelchair or bike. The temporary bridge is so steep you need to be reasonably fit to tackle it on foot. They are not compliant with the Disability Access requirements of the Equalities Act, and are a barrier for people trying to access the town. Different members of the Executive have assured us for years that the Council was working with Network Rail to get a step free bridge installed. At one stage, these Members were even talking about contributing CIL money. What pressure is this Council exerting on Network Rail to ensure that this crossing of the railway is compliant with the Equalities Act, for its residents as a matter of urgency?

Answer:

I need to give you a written answer to this. It is a bit too detailed for a ward matter I think. So, if you could bear with me I will get you a written answer.

66.13 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Residents Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:**Question:**

A Hawkedon resident recently visited Cornwall and saw solar panels that were the size of small roof tiles on some new properties. When looking at updating the Borough Design Guide, can we include a requirement for developers to use these small solar panel roof tiles when approving developments in Wokingham?

Answer:

It is a really great piece of technology. I have seen it a couple of times now, had it shown to me a couple of times by people on Facebook, and other places. I have been talking to an organisation called the Active Building Centre, and I am trying to get their leadership to come along to talk at the next cross party working group on climate emergency. They are doing some absolutely fantastic work in terms of retrofitting houses and also how to design houses going forward to make them carbon neutral or even carbon positive. I will look into it and I am sure Wayne has an opinion as well.

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

John Halsall proposed the suspension of rule 4.2.12 q to enable him to speak for up to 10 minutes and for the Statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members item to be extended to up to 25 minutes. This was seconded

by Chris Bowring. Upon being put to the vote, it was agreed that the rule be suspended for the meeting.

John Halsall Leader of the Council:

First of all I take pleasure in announcing that Charlotte Haitham Taylor will chair the Arts and Council Working Group in the future.

Wokingham Borough Council and Wokingham Borough is facing an existential threat. I do not use those words lightly. The beautiful Borough that it is my honour to serve could very soon be no more if we do not stop the Government's plans to inflict an avalanche of housing development upon us. The innocent sounding but deeply pernicious changes to the current planning system consultation, ends in just two weeks. This consultation was launched in almost total secrecy during the school summer holidays when the nation was focused on GCSEs, A levels, lockdowns and quarantines. It was also launched alongside a far more heralded consultation called 'Planning for the future' which has generated debate and notoriety, which is in fact a smokescreen as it is only a Green Paper; a set of ideas that may or may not become law at some point in the future. The changes to the planning system on the other hand requires no change to the law and could be enacted almost immediately after the consultation ends, with just the Minister's signature, and yet its ramifications will be felt in our Borough and many others across the country, forever more. We must be clear what is at stake. In just two weeks' time at the stroke of Secretary of State Robert Jenrick's pen, we could be condemned to face 1635 new houses being built in the Borough each year. That is a town the size of Wokingham in less than a decade. This would come with less affordable housing because fewer developments would be required to provide it. There would be no appeal, no further debate. Two weeks, that is all we have got.

Let me paint you a picture of the dystopian future. Our levels of congestion would be intolerable. Access to medical services, schools and other basic services, would be stretched to bursting point. We would see the green of the Borough disappear. This level of development would see an increase of just short of 25% in ten years which would approximate to 15% with the land mass. The plan led development, which has been at the core of the Council's strategy, for a sustainable future, would be imperilled by the lack of a defensible five year land supply which would need to be in the region of 10000 to discourage speculative land promoters. This would further imperil the infrastructure funded by the developers. The Government says all this destruction is necessary to get the economy going and to prevent NIMBYs blocking necessary housing. But that is a false position. We have proved with our carefully planned development in recent years that there is an alternative to both the Government's Developers Charter and just say no attitude. We are not the NIMBYs of the Government propaganda. We believe in building the homes that people need, in providing Council housing and genuinely affordable housing for all. We do not believe in and will never accept the position of a concrete swamp across our fields and villages.

Since early August, I have been working ceaselessly to ensure that our cause gains the widest publicity. I have used any and every stunt to gain notoriety. All our MPs have been hugely supportive. I have spoken to huge numbers of Council leaders and Members of Parliament, probably within the hundreds now of each. I have undertaken an influential debate with England's leading planning barrister Chris Katokowski, who was part of the authorship of the Planning for the Future White Paper. Anybody who wishes to see it and who has not, please contact me. I have used any and every stunt to gain notoriety as I have said. Conservative Home helped, as did the Daily Mail. I have led the Unitary

Councils Network's response and that of the South East's Strategic Leaders. It has been a little like chucking mud at a wall unceasingly in the hope that some sticks. I have talked to Kent County Council. I have talked to all the councillors in the Westmead. I am delighted that finally I seem to have broken through, and had a long and productive conversation with Robert Jenrick on Friday last. I used the opportunity to invite him to the Borough, which he was pleased to accept. However, that is only the beginning, the end of the beginning. It is important that now he is aware of the issue he becomes aware of the strength of feeling in the Borough. We have appealed to all residents to write to their MP, the Secretary of State, sign up to the petition, and respond to the consultation. I am urging everybody to join me in that campaign. Time is running out but hope is not lost. Please take action today.

We are facing another threat whose effects are equally serious and can be devastating. We are continuing to face Coronavirus. Initially we thought, we hoped, that it would be short term and then a solution would be found. This is far from the case. During the emergency, we should remember that though our cases have been low some have sadly died and others have been very ill. We have changed the way we worked, supporting all our residents and ensured that the services ran as normal as far as possible. Whilst this was expensive financially this was eminently doable in the short term, and I believe we did the right thing. We now are having to face both ways. We now know that there is not going to be a short-term fix. Much of that, that we did at the height of the crisis, we shall continue to need to do. We have returned with few exceptions to delivering all our services, but and it is a big but, the financial environment is very strained. Not only do we have to recover the cost of what we did earlier in the year, but from a lower income base than we had in the past. Also, we have to confront the cost of expanded services. An example is the expected income of leisure services and car parking is very much lower. On the cost side, we are looking after more of the vulnerable children and adults, and the cost of care homes has increased. So, in confronting 2021-22 we will have to be more imaginative and more commercial. We may not be able to achieve all the aspirations that we had in the short term and delay the implementation of projects. This will be the debate of many months to come and it is somewhat dependent on the length of the emergency and the extent of Government intervention.

Lastly, please follow the Government's guidance of physical hygiene i.e. wash your hands, social distancing at all times, cover your face when required to. It saves lives.

Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Highways and Transport:

The Highways team have been busy progressing the Borough's new road schemes, taking advantage of Covid lockdown when roads were quieter to resurface busy areas such as the A4, Showcase roundabout and Molly Millers Lane. The new Arborfield Cross relief road is progressing well and we look forward to opening it at the end of October. The new London Road cycleway in Wokingham will also be completed by the end of October. This cycleway is designed for young cyclists to be use either the road or considerately share the new wide pavement depending on their confidence, cycling ability, and of course the speed that they want to travel at.

Works to the north Wokingham distributor road to connect the Old Forest Road to Reading Road, has commenced and major investment is underway in highways maintenance with the doubling of the budget this year to £8million. Over one hundred roads are earmarked for resurfacing. We have done quite a lot of microasphalt already with the resurfacing schemes dealing with some of the worst roads starting soon, with the long awaited resurfacing of the top of Hartsbourne Road which will start around 19 October.

I am very keen to return Wokingham town centre to as near normal as possible following the Covid related restrictions introduced when shops were first reopened on 15 June. The aim is to assist businesses and also to make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road and taxis to operate. Following conversations with local shop keepers arranged by local councillors Julian McGhee Sumner and Phil Cunnington, and several meetings with shop keepers representatives of the Town Council, I am pleased to advise of the successful removal of barriers in Rectory Road and Wiltshire Road. We have agreed that Covid barriers on the normal side of Broad Street from Nat West bank will be removed this weekend, restoring the taxi rank. If this is successful, we are scheduled to remove all the remaining barriers on the weekend of the 26th/27th. At the request of the Town Council the traders' representatives, the barriers on the Post Office side will not be removed until 26th/27th either. We will also be adding some more signage to remind people to socially distance and also to please ask them to support local businesses.

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

I want to briefly update Members on a few things that are going on in terms of Public Health. First of all the current situation with Covid 19. Cases remain low in Wokingham. As things stand currently our Track and Trace figure is running at nearly 90% which is a reflection of the hard work that is going on to keep these things this way. Wokingham is currently a very low risk area for Covid and everyone is working very hard to keep it that way. This is on a background of when schools have gone back and we are trying very hard to keep the message going out about following the Government advice, as Councillor Halsall mentioned.

Members will be aware of the NHS Track and Trace app which is now live from 24 September. This has been months of work to get this ready. We looked at all the other apps on the market basically and are convinced that this is by far the best one, and encourage all Members and residents to adopt it, and all local businesses. It is a key part of how we fight Covid.

As the time has gone on, we are obviously changing our response to Covid in the community. We will see shortly in a few weeks, we will be launching what we call Community Response Part 2, which was changing and adapting to the situation; focusing on mental health, people who are stuck at home and are too scared to come out and need support, focusing on loneliness and also focusing on those who may be sadly about to become unemployed and providing them with the support and advice that they need.

I wanted to also talk about testing which has been much in the news recently. The national situation with the shortage of lab capacity is obviously very concerning. Can we assure everybody that as things stand today our care homes are safe and have enough testing and the situation there is being continually monitored. We have been working very hard to get some progress with this. Myself, Councillor Halsall and Councillor Kaiser attended a meeting with John Redwood, James Sunderland and Theresa May online to lobby forcefully our unhappiness with the situation and to get them to actually work with us to resolve it. I know James Sunderland had a meeting on our behalf with the Health Minister yesterday to raise these issues. I am pleased to advise that we have secured extra testing from our health partners which will be available for key workers as and when we need. We are keen to go forward to make sure that all the needy, the vulnerable and the key workers of Wokingham are supported. In April when central Government could not provide PPE, we mounted a public appeal and private procurement to secure enough PPE to keep our key workers going, to keep our care homes safe. In May when the Royal

Berkshire was discharging patients with Covid into our care homes without tests, we broke central Government advice and refused discharges to keep our community safe until basically testing could be put in place. Today, central Government cannot provide enough testing. We have secured extra testing for our key workers from our health partners already and we are in the process of procuring further private testing to ensure all of our key workers, social workers, dealing with the aged and vulnerable, education key workers as well, have access to testing and that we have provision for any possible emergencies that come down the road. Again, we are trying to be proactive, positive and do everything that we can to keep our residents safe.

UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children’s Services:

The Covid restrictions over the recent months have posed unprecedented challenges to Children’s Services in Wokingham. I am proud to say that our dedicated staff have continued to work tirelessly to support children, young people and schools throughout this crisis. The Learning, Achievements and Partnership service has worked closely with schools to ensure their safe opening this term, supporting work with individual parents and carers to allay their fears and securing safe and sufficient school transport, including additional buses, taxis and routes to support existing arrangements. We also have in schools made the best use of the catch up premium and national tutoring programme announced by the Government in July, which is designed to help children make up for the lost teaching time that they have experienced. This has been a tough year for school leavers but I am delighted to tell you that four of our children in care and care leavers have been offered places at university to start this year.

In social care, arrangements were swiftly put in place at the beginning of the lockdown to ensure that the most vulnerable children continued to be seen face-to-face, using appropriate PPE. Children received regular contact through innovative use of virtual technology, something which has not been replicated in other authorities. Our Family Resource Centre has remained open throughout, offering safe opportunities for parents to spend time with their children. The Bridges Short Breaks Centre has continued to offer day and overnight respite visits for disabled children. Our other centres are now starting to reopen with appropriate safety measures in place. We have had many compliments from parents, foster carers and young people on our response to the Covid restrictions, and the support that they have received. I am sure you will join me in thanking our staff for their incredible continuing dedication and hard work in these most difficult circumstances.

Our new specialist Compass team, working intensively with children whose placements are at risk of breakdown or who are at risk of coming into care is now fully recruited to, and already supporting nine young people. Four new practice assistants have joined us this week to support the social workers in delivering high quality services to children and young people. At the same time turnover of staff in the social care teams, which had been very high, has reduced below that of our comparative authorities. The number of locum workers is reducing in line with our plans. All in all very good news.

68. MOTIONS

68.1 Motion 439 submitted by Rachel Burgess

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion, submitted by Rachel Burgess and seconded by Shirley Boyt.

‘This Council will adopt the Council Tax Protocol agreed by Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association (June 2017) during the municipal year 2020/21.

This protocol includes, inter alia:

- Wokingham Borough Council will work with enforcement agencies and Citizens Advice to help people pay their council tax bills while accessing debt advice
- All communication with residents about council tax will be clear
- Wokingham Borough Council will consider using the Standard Financial Statement when calculating repayment plans
- Flexible payment arrangements will be offered to residents
- Where a resident receives Council Tax support, Wokingham Borough Council will consider matters carefully, including refraining from using enforcement agents
- Wokingham Borough Council will publish their policy on residents in vulnerable circumstances

The full protocol can be found here:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/Citizens%20Advice%20Council%20Tax%20Protocol%202017.pdf>

Rachel Burgess commented that she had submitted the Motion on a number of occasions and was pleased that the Executive had now signed the Council Tax protocol. Building on that progress, the Motion called on the Council to fully adopt the protocol and implement the actions contained within in it.

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

RESOLVED: That this Council will adopt the Council Tax Protocol agreed by Citizens Advice and the Local Government Association (June 2017) during the municipal year 2020/21.

This protocol includes, inter alia:

- Wokingham Borough Council will work with enforcement agencies and Citizens Advice to help people pay their council tax bills while accessing debt advice
- All communication with residents about council tax will be clear
- Wokingham Borough Council will consider using the Standard Financial Statement when calculating repayment plans
- Flexible payment arrangements will be offered to residents
- Where a resident receives Council Tax support, Wokingham Borough Council will consider matters carefully, including refraining from using enforcement agents
- Wokingham Borough Council will publish their policy on residents in vulnerable circumstances

The full protocol can be found here:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/campaigns/Council%20Tax/Citizens%20Advice%20Council%20Tax%20Protocol%202017.pdf>

68.2 Motion 440 submitted by Rachel Bishop-Firth

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Rachel Bishop-Firth and seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

‘EU nationals are our family members, parents, friends and colleagues. They care for our elderly and they teach our children. They are an integral part of a vibrant and thriving Wokingham.

In the Referendum campaign, we were promised that "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK and [they] ...will be treated no less favourably than they are at present".

This promise has not been honoured. Many EU citizens are unaware that if Brexit goes ahead, they risk deportation from their homes of many years unless they are granted settled status.

Home Office figures show that many EU nationals have not applied for Settled Status, or have applied but have been refused. We don't know how many Wokingham residents, perhaps elderly or vulnerable people, are unaware that they may become illegal immigrants. We risk a Windrush-style scandal here in Wokingham, with families broken up.

We also need to think of the 1.3 million British citizens who have made their homes in EU countries, who may be forced to return to the UK, particularly when Brexit means they lose their access to healthcare. Many of these people are elderly, and many have made their homes overseas because of difficulties making ends meet on their pensions. How many will come to Wokingham, needing assistance with social housing and other support?

Therefore, the Council asks that Officers urgently undertake and publish a review of the how the Council can best mitigate the effects of Brexit on local residents including:

1. How we can promote and assist with applications for settled status particularly for residents who face language or technology barriers.
2. What we can do to help landlords and employers to be trained on immigration status, to avoid potential discrimination against EU nationals.
3. How Brexit is likely to affect EU nationals accessing services provided by the Council, and steps that we can take to mitigate difficulties.
4. The likely impact on Wokingham of British citizens returning to the UK and how we can best prepare for this.'

Rachel Bishop-Firth commented that she had first submitted the Motion in October last year. It was important to support those residents who would have to apply for settled status, some of whom may not realise that they had to do so. She was pleased that the Council had offered to assist residents with the settled status app if they needed it and questioned how those who might have language or technology difficulties could be further assisted. Many British citizens currently living abroad may also be forced to return to the UK and would also require support.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey reiterated the need to support EU citizens living locally.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Daniel Sargeant that the Motion be amended as follows:

'EU nationals are our family members, parents, friends and colleagues. They care for our elderly and they teach our children. They are an integral part of a vibrant and thriving Wokingham.

In the Referendum campaign, we were promised that "there will be no change for EU citizens already lawfully resident in the UK and [they] ...will be treated no less favourably than they are at present".

This promise has not been honoured. Many EU27 citizens are unaware that if Brexit goes ahead, they risk deportation from their homes of many years unless they are granted settled status.

Home Office figures show that many EU nationals have not applied for Settled Status, or have applied but have been refused. We don't know how many Wokingham residents, perhaps elderly or vulnerable people, are unaware that they may become illegal immigrants. We risk a Windrush-style scandal here in Wokingham, with families broken up.

We also need to think of the 1.3 million British citizens who have made their homes in other EU countries, who may be forced to return to the UK, particularly if Brexit means they lose their access to healthcare. Many of these people are elderly, and many have made their homes overseas because of difficulties making ends meet on their pensions. How many will come to Wokingham, needing assistance with social housing and other support?

Therefore, the Council asks that Officers urgently undertake ~~and publish~~ a review of ~~the how the Council can best mitigate~~ the effects of Brexit on local residents **and publicise what we intend to do and what mitigations we have already implemented** including:

- a) How we ~~can~~ promote and assist with applications for settled status particularly for residents who face language or technology barriers.
- b) What we ~~can do~~ **provide** to help landlords and employers to be trained on immigration status, to avoid potential discrimination against EU27 nationals.
- c) How Brexit is likely to affect EU27 nationals accessing services provided by the Council, and steps that we can take to mitigate difficulties.
- d) The likely impact on Wokingham of British citizens returning to the UK and how we can best prepare for this.'

Pauline Jorgensen commented that a lot of work had already been carried out regarding the possible effects of Brexit.

68.3 Adjournment of the meeting

At this point in the meeting, 9.43pm, the meeting was adjourned.

68.4 Continuation of Motion of 440 submitted by Rachel Bishop-Firth

At this point in the meeting, 9.45pm, the meeting continued.

The amendment to the Motion was accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

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

RESOLVED: That EU nationals are our family members, parents, friends and colleagues. They care for our elderly and they teach our children. They are an integral part of a vibrant and thriving Wokingham.

In the Referendum campaign, we were promised that "there will be no change for EU

citizens already lawfully resident in the UK and [they] ...will be treated no less favourably than they are at present”.

This promise has not been honoured. Many EU27 citizens are unaware that if Brexit goes ahead, they risk deportation from their homes of many years unless they are granted settled status.

Home Office figures show that many EU nationals have not applied for Settled Status, or have applied but have been refused. We don't know how many Wokingham residents, perhaps elderly or vulnerable people, are unaware that they may become illegal immigrants. We risk a Windrush-style scandal here in Wokingham, with families broken up.

We also need to think of the 1.3 million British citizens who have made their homes in other EU countries, who may be forced to return to the UK, particularly if Brexit means they lose their access to healthcare. Many of these people are elderly, and many have made their homes overseas because of difficulties making ends meet on their pensions. How many will come to Wokingham, needing assistance with social housing and other support?

Therefore, the Council asks that Officers urgently undertake a review of the effects of Brexit on local residents and publicise what we intend to do and what mitigations we have already implemented including:

- a) How we promote and assist with applications for settled status particularly for residents who face language or technology barriers.
- b) What we provide to help landlords and employers to be trained on immigration status, to avoid potential discrimination against EU27 nationals.
- c) How Brexit is likely to affect EU27 nationals accessing services provided by the Council, and steps that we can take to mitigate difficulties.
- d) The likely impact on Wokingham of British citizens returning to the UK and how we can best prepare for this.

68.5 Motion 441 submitted by Pauline Helliar-Symons

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Pauline Helliar-Symons and seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

‘On 22nd November 2018, this Council adopted a Sprinkler Policy centred on our schools. After work by Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, the Fire Authority's Management Committee on 22nd July 2019 adopted a wider policy which they proposed be considered by each of the Berkshire Unitaries. This goes further to support promotion of Sprinklers in their Council areas and to put pressure on Central Government to legislate on Sprinklers, following the successful introduction of legal powers in Wales.

To be specific it is proposed:

That Wokingham Borough Council supports the proposals of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to extend the promotion of Sprinklers and to lobby central government to bring in legislation or regulations which make installations a necessary part of new builds and major refurbishments in the categories identified. The policy agreed by the Council on

22nd November 2018 regarding schools remains, but additionally:

Wokingham Borough Council:

- a) Recognises that Sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals the community in general and firefighters, especially in the case of schools.
- b) Commits to installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when planning for and constructing new buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings where the extent of the refurbishment makes the fitting of sprinklers viable.
- c) Through the planning application or building control process, promote and support the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the public and firefighters.
- d) Supports the National Fire Chiefs Council position on sprinklers and will write to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.'

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

RESOLVED: That on 22nd November 2018, this Council adopted a Sprinkler Policy centred on our schools. After work by Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, the Fire Authority's Management Committee on 22nd July 2019 adopted a wider policy which they proposed be considered by each of the Berkshire Unitaries. This goes further to support promotion of Sprinklers in their Council areas and to put pressure on Central Government to legislate on Sprinklers, following the successful introduction of legal powers in Wales.

To be specific it is proposed:

That Wokingham Borough Council supports the proposals of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to extend the promotion of Sprinklers and to lobby central government to bring in legislation or regulations which make installations a necessary part of new builds and major refurbishments in the categories identified. The policy agreed by the Council on 22nd November 2018 regarding schools remains, but additionally:

Wokingham Borough Council:

- a) Recognises that Sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals the community in general and firefighters, especially in the case of schools.
- b) Commits to installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when planning for and constructing new buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings where the extent of the refurbishment makes the fitting of sprinklers viable.

- c) Through the planning application or building control process, promote and support the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the public and firefighters.
- d) Supports the National Fire Chiefs Council position on sprinklers and will write to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.

68.6 Continuation of the meeting

At this point in the meeting, 10.02pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Stephen Conway.

The Mayor agreed that a recorded vote would be held.

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

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

68.7 Motion 442 submitted by Gary Cowan

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

68.8 Motion 443 submitted by Maria Gee

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

