

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 29 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Chris Bowring

Prue Bray

Gary Cowan

Andy Croy

David Hare

Graham Howe

Abdul Loyes

Tahir Maher

Andrew Mickleburgh

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Caroline Smith

33. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

34. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings of the Executive and the Extraordinary Executive held on 24 September 2020 were confirmed as correct records and will be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

35. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

36. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

It is now eight months since we had the first outbreak of Coronavirus almost to the day. Since mid-September the cases in Wokingham have been rising. Sadly, also deaths are rising. The hope that we would be able to return to normal for Christmas is fast receding.

Our policy is to ensure as far we can to remain in Tier One. This is consistent with our neighbours notwithstanding press reports to the contrary. We believe that Tier One gives our businesses the best chance to recover and allows for our residents to lead as full a life as possible.

Coronavirus is transmitted by contact or near contact. If we can inculcate a permanent behavioural change then we can slow the rate of increase and reduce it. Your Council is doing what is within its power to do so.

We are working with our care homes to keep them safe. Again, we are at odds with Government policy in that we will not be dedicating a care home to Covid patients but are insisting on positive evidence of Covid free status. So, the Tower beckons me again.

We are asking our schools to help us by championing the cause. If we can recruit every school child as an evangelist, then the message will get into homes as it is in the homes where it is believed that most transmission occurs. Schools can also help by ensuring that when children leave school settings that the children remain separated and that parents picking them up do not mix.

Our University has not suffered as other universities from the return of students by the exercise of careful and responsible control.

Our trace system is now working well and this week we have started door knocking. We will be auditing our commercial and recreational premises to ensure the proper application of QR codes and adherence to regulation. This week we fined various establishments for non-observance.

We will be launching a scheme of community champions and marshals to lead by example, spread the word and provide factual information about the impact of the virus across the Borough. We are calling upon you, as Councillors, to join this initiative and we will arm you with all the stats, advice and comms messaging you need to disseminate through your networks on a weekly basis.

Fortunately, our residents are discerning and sophisticated who in the main are observing the rules and understand our difficulties. These programmes and more have had an effect. I am nervous to say that the curve is decelerating and flattening off. My nervousness is as I do not want to tempt fate but there are very cautious signs for optimism.

I appreciate that everyone is tired, and it has been going on a long time, but sadly it will go on for much longer. Whilst there is energy going into a vaccine, it is not successful and if it were it would be six months before it can be relied upon. So, we as a Borough and Borough Council must plan for the winter and spring and be in hope that next summer we will return to normal – if we can remember what that is.

It is vital that our resources both human and financial are directed to alleviate need and are not frittered away by unnecessary work or tasks. We still have an obligation to balance the budget and it is still expected that we will not be fully compensated by central Government for all Covid related expenditures and losses.

I ask all Councillors to help in this. We will not be able to do everything we have been doing, for example residents may have to live with unkempt hedges, uncut verges or a pothole. Councillors will not be able to rely upon the level of attention that they have been used to receive.

Having said that we have been at pains to reintroduce the democratic processes as soon as possible and I point out to the naysayers that some of our neighbours have yet to have a full council meeting and many of our neighbours are still working to a scheme of delegation. It could be said of Wokingham that politics has returned with a vengeance, both in the second and third estates.

Our task is now to ensure that every resident is safe, secure and not isolated. The key is to guarantee that everybody has a warm home, and they have food and medicines they need. This administration has worked very hard to ensure that the homeless in the Borough are very low and to ensure that those who are homeless are looked after. We have housed all the rough sleepers except one who insists that he prefers not being housed.

We will do the same with poverty, especially food and fuel. We are determined to eliminate poverty in the Borough.

It is extremely important throughout this emergency that our residents have confidence in the Council. Statements that there are “6,300 children in poverty and rising” and that there are “one in six children living in poverty” in the Borough we do not believe to be accurate or responsible. The indexes based on “housing costs” compared to median income have less to do with poverty and more to do with house prices and the structure of employment in the Home Counties.

Poverty measured by reference to the median income will by definition always be there. We need to work with a definition of absolute need specifically with reference to hunger and warm homes. It is not a position of virtue signalling but of practical help.

The Borough is measured by ONS in the index of multiple deprivation as being the lowest after Hart, which is a District, in the table and the disparity between the highest Blackpool and Wokingham is huge. We enjoy and have enjoyed the lowest funding of any Unitary for many years consequently. It is inconceivable that we are the second to lowest in the index of multiple deprivation and that there are 6,300 children in poverty and rising or one in six.

Having said that, one vulnerable person, child or family is too much. And this is an area that I am taking very seriously. Especially so, in the light of the impact of Covid.

Our model has been for the Council to work with the voluntary sector using the CAB as the front door. We also work with the NHS and our practices around the Borough. We get the best when we work with our partners and we do not plough our separate agendas; otherwise it's confusing for our residents.

The Executive, CLT and the voluntary sector will create the architecture for this important piece of work; both the Executive and I will be intimately involved. We must clearly identify where there exists need in the Borough so that we can tackle the root cause of that need and support it until we have done so. I will consult with the Leader of the Opposition and keep other Group Leaders apprised of our progress.

We shall hold special Executive meetings to authorise the strategy and expenditure as we go along as this exercise must be at pace.

As for this half term, I am extremely grateful to all the restaurants, shops and pubs who have extended their services for free or subsidised school meals and to the food banks and voluntary sector partners. The pressure for the Council to extend food vouchers came after it was feasible to undertake this through schools. The Council would have had to act unilaterally without the appropriate notice or case being made in the Executive. This could have resulted in another expensive call-in.

I want to effectively plan for the coming months and deeply understand poverty in this Borough and the causes of poverty. I am also confident that we can more fully meet the spirit of the Government's National Food Strategy.

It must be remembered that although the current publicity is being given to free schools meals, the biggest cohort of the vulnerable are likely to be the old where we may be required to shield again depending on Government Policy. It is this cohort, children and any others, whom we will be addressing in our Poverty Strategy.

Finally, please help me to help you. Those on this call are Councillors, the press and interested members of the public. What you do and say will have an enormous impact on public behaviour towards this virus. Please do not make things up because it is politically expedient or makes a good story. To get through this successfully residents must have confidence in the Council and the press. Residents must feel that we are doing our best to keep everyone safe, secure and happy. Residents must be able to rely upon these rules and those who propagate them.

The key rules are:

- Hands, face and space;
- QR codes and logging in;
- Quarantining when asked;
- Rule of six; and
- Minimise household mixing

Thank you very much for listening, keep safe and become an evangelist to the cause.

37. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

37.1 Keith Kerr asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Equalities Act 2010 subsection 149 Public Sector Equality Duty [in particular sub paragraphs 1,3,5,6 & 7], must be complied with;

1. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - A. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - B. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - C. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

As the Leader of a Public Authority you have recently made postings and statements on Black Lives Matter (BLM), do you believe you have complied with the letter or the spirit of the law?

Answer

Thank you very much for your question Keith and I was delighted to be able to meet you.

I am always pleased to restate the Council's and my position that we are anti-racist, promote equality and celebrate diversity.

You are correct in stating that the Council has a legal duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations as you set out in your question.

The Council is committed to equality of opportunity and the delivery of high-quality services for all our residents. We seek to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty through policy development, staff training, service delivery and work with our partners and stakeholders.

We are currently reviewing and updating our Equality Policy with a view to examining how we can improve. You, and all residents, have my personal commitment that this (together with Poverty) remains one of the Council's priorities notwithstanding the very necessary work we are doing in response to the Covid-19 second wave.

Examples of what we have done:

- We have appointed a Director for Equalities (Keeley Clements) and an Executive Member (myself) which will be followed by driving actions through the Equality Steering group which will include the Chief Executive and I;
- We have produced the Equality Monitoring Workforce report which will go to the Personnel Board in November followed by publishing an ethnicity pay gap report next year;
- We have committed to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying within CLT which will come to the Executive in due course;
- We have signed up to the Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that:
 - Equality in the workplace is the responsibility of all leaders and managers and this will be communicated to all at the extended Corporate Leadership Team, Manager Network briefings and to all staff;
 - We take action that supports ethnic minority career progression and we will support this activity by whatever external resource is necessary.
- We are working through the implementation of the Equality Framework for Local Government in all that we do.

The Council has made a commitment to facilitating a discussion on the future purpose of the independent BME Forum and this group, as well as the Council's Black (BME) Employee Group, would be important contributors to future work on equality and act as critical friends and we hope you will serve on it.

We are determined to be a beacon of best practice and good race relations. Black Lives Matter in Wokingham.

With regard to my postings and statements on BLM I have previously apologised publicly for any unintended offence I caused to residents who may have misconstrued my comments. I would like to repeat this apology but I would like also to reiterate my request to you Keith, and all residents, to work with the Council in ensuring all parts of our community are represented and their voices are heard.

The prize of all our residents and employees feeling valued and included is very great and one to which we earnestly aspire.

Supplementary Question

Of course I welcome, and I am sure the whole community will welcome, the change of tone towards those of black heritage but of course at the heart of the matter is credibility. What action you will take to educate yourself and direct Wokingham Council that will change the lived experience of black people as they interface with the Borough Council through the services they receive and their experience of living in Wokingham?

Supplementary Answer

How do I educate myself, well at 70 it is quite hard but I am doing my very best to understand the vicissitudes of Harry Washington, Sierra Leone, Bunce Island and I think in the last six months I have come a long way.

As far as the Council is concerned we need to work through a serious piece of work which is the Equality Framework for Local Government. We have just stepped on that path. It is a very detailed piece of work so as we work through it we need to set up the architecture; so that architecture then can lock-in the equalities and race relations work which we need to do.

37.2 Ian Shenton asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

What specific challenges does the provision of mental health services in our Borough face so that they can respond to the outcomes of Covid-19 and all of its consequences, and what new and additional actions is WBC taking to bolster mental health provision to tackle these Covid-related challenges?

Answer

We are fully aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on people's wellbeing. 15% of Wokingham residents have a formal diagnosis of depression. Over 40% of GP consultations relate in some way to mental health issues and there has been a doubling of people experiencing issues related to their wellbeing, from 1 in 5 to 1 in 10. Sadly the situation is likely to deteriorate further over the winter months.

The Borough's Community Response has sought to reach out to those isolated and vulnerable. Adult Social Care made over 6,000 initial welfare checks with 16,000 follow up welfare calls via the Wokingham Borough Council Link Visiting Scheme and there have been 4,000 calls to the "One Front Door" system, supported by WBC and the Citizens Advice Bureau. The "One Front Door" system takes calls of any nature, many of which relate to mental health. These initiatives are being repeated and will stay in place over the next few months as Covid cases rise.

To bolster this further we have two further initiatives. Firstly, we are doing a project with Earley Plus PCN and Citizens Advice to encourage residents to call the "One Front Door" if their wellbeing is suffering. Citizens Advice will try to resolve some of the underlying issues causing depression and anxiety, such as financial stress and relationship breakdowns. Part of their service is that they can signpost to other specialist services, whether it is formal mental health or other voluntary organisations. If successful the project can be rolled out across the whole Borough.

In addition, Wokingham Borough Council are sourcing a specialist voluntary sector provider to provide support to those suffering from mild to moderate mental health issues. The specification includes Wellbeing Support Workers, who will talk through issues over a number of sessions, as well as signposting to groups and activities to support them. The organisation will take referrals from GPs, statutory or voluntary organisations. They will also be tasked to support the voluntary sector with full mental health training and it is hoped that this service will be fully mobilised early next year.

This year Wokingham Borough Council has also set up a Recovery College which provides courses and workshops for people with mental health needs and their carers in the Borough. The courses are focused on understanding mental health issues, managing mental health in a positive way and generally keeping well. They also provide life skill training and access to help support to gain employment. These courses are open to the general public who can register themselves with the College. The courses are currently delivered online because of the obvious situation with Covid.

The Council has also run a project to coordinate and collate resources for use by the general public to manage their mental health and wellbeing during Covid. These resources are available for children and adults and include information, guidance, access to the voluntary sector and other apps. They are all available on Wokingham Borough Council's website. The website also provides details on how to access Talking Therapies and formal community mental health services for any people with higher levels of need.

Supplementary Question

I did not specifically hear schools mentioned there. May I ask if as the Council supports a lot of mental health initiatives in schools how are schools being supported to cope with their almost certain increased demand I think given the state of education at the moment?

Supplementary Answer

I will answer that question in two sections if I may. All the services which I detailed to you, "One Front Door" all of those things, are specifically available for adults and children. I accept they are not solely dedicated to schools basically but they are for everyone. They are not specifically split. We have also set up as part of our Covid response a specialist schools task force to provide support to headteachers across the Borough basically dealing with the stressful and difficult situation they find themselves in. Now that is obviously designed to support Covid cases but also situations such as this.

But if I may, because I am talking slightly outside my field, what I will do is liaise with my colleague Councillor Clark, who is the Executive Member responsible for Children and obviously education falls in her portfolio not mine, I will ask basically for a written response for any other issues which I am not aware of to be sent to you.

37.3 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Prevention and treatment services for non-communicable diseases have been severely disrupted during the pandemic. In addition, many people have been skipping tests and check-ups as well as not contacting health services from fear of infection.

Are there any groups that WBC has identified that appear to be particularly 'hard to reach' with public health messaging about the importance of getting tests and treatments and, if so, what additional action could be taken to reach out to these vulnerable groups?

Answer

I would say to you and to anyone else who is listening to this that it is very important that all residents of Wokingham continue to access routine healthcare and screening appointments as well as seeking medical care for new and concerning symptoms. We will all be widely aware basically of the continual media stories about illnesses not being diagnosed and cancer cases being taken late because of people not going to GPs and seeking treatment. GPs are open and I would encourage everybody to use them. To promote this message the Public Health Team at Wokingham Borough Council have been working on a health promotion campaign which is very much along the lines of 'healthcare as usual' as a core message.

This campaign focuses on four main areas; childhood vaccinations, routine screening (for breast, cervical, bowel cancers, pregnancy and newborn babies), seeking help for concerning symptoms and asking for help with mental health issues; which obviously relates to the question I just answered. These public health messages will be disseminated over the coming weeks through a variety of channels via social media, email, newsletters to residents and the WBC Housing Magazine.

In addition there is an active involvement of the WBC Public Health Team in both regional and local work around health and wellbeing in the recovery phase of the Covid pandemic. This work will provide early insight into groups that have been particularly disadvantaged with regard to accessing routine healthcare during the pandemic and allow us to work effectively to address these issues.

Supplementary Question

I am encouraged to hear all the efforts being put in but I am slightly dismayed that a lot of it is very much using the digital approach. I have got an 86 year old Mother in Law. She does not have e-mail and she cannot use a mobile phone. She is pretty much housebound due to mobility issues. Yes she has medical care which is great but I am not sure how the messages would get to her and people in a similar situation of which I suspect there are many in Wokingham?

Supplementary Answer

I think basically there are several answers to that question. I did mention digital answers and obviously in the time of Covid it is impossible to send people out physically to check up on these things. I also mentioned the WBC Housing Magazine which obviously arrives in the post and I refer you to the answer that came up in my previous question which is that throughout the Covid pandemic the WBC Adult Services Team has been regularly ringing people who are in need or classified as vulnerable or shielding to check on their wellbeing, basically to address any issues and to try and find resolutions and provide support and the statistics for that were in my last answer. 4,700 people we were ringing and many thousands of phone calls and the aim of that is to try and reach people like your Mother in Law and people who may need our help.

37.4 Philip Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

Recommendation 7 of the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group calls on the Council to include progress of measures aimed at reducing Consumption Emissions coming into the Borough. Other than asking residents to buy less, what can be done to reduce emissions that seem to me to sit outside of the Council's control?

Answer

Communities consume thousands of different types of products and services every day and the emissions associated with these are affected by the numerous decisions that we also make every day.

A study made in 2018 by the University of Leeds, University of New South Wales, and Arup revealed that individual consumption-based Green House Gas emissions are highest in Europe, North America and Oceania, between 10 and 25 tCO₂e/capita. Household consumption categories include capital, utilities and bills, food, transport, clothing, furnishings and household equipment, restaurants, hotels, recreation and culture.

Although, through understanding these supply chains, businesses and residents can potentially influence their carbon emissions, the scale and complexity of measuring and monitoring consumption emissions is considerable. Going beyond the Council's sphere of influence and our available resources.

Wokingham Borough Council believes residents have great insight into the challenges presented by addressing these emissions and understand that the way to address this is through making informed purchasing decisions. The role of the Council should be to focus on educating communities and businesses about the impact of consumption emissions and encourage by making decisions that will reduce these emissions.

Therefore, the Council wants to bring together residents, in the form of a number of Citizen's Assemblies, to investigate, discuss and make recommendations to Wokingham Borough Council on how to respond to consumption emissions and other areas of our Climate Emergency Action Plan and in particular what needs to be done to change current behaviours.

We believe that these Citizen's Assemblies will significantly strengthen our Climate Emergency Action Plan and our efforts to promote behavioural change and promote new lifestyle choices.

Supplementary Question

It is really good to hear that Wokingham Borough Council continue to show climate change leadership by deciding to run Citizen's Assemblies. So I guess the question I have is how can we ensure that the recommendations remain objective and not politically or ideology based?

Supplementary Answer

That is a great question and one that has been at the centre of the discussions that we have been having about Citizen's Assemblies for a couple of months now.

The reality is that Citizen's Assemblies are advisory bodies. They are a group of citizens that listen to evidence from experts and make recommendations and give advice to the Council in terms of what our future actions should be. In that what I would really like to see is that we have a demographically balanced group of individuals. I want to make sure that there is no real political bias within that group so as part of setting them up we will look to make sure that the people that are involved in it are not well known political activists. Similarly we want to make sure that the people that are on these are not hugely environmental activists or climate change deniers. We want to make sure that the people who are going into it are doing so in such a way that they do not already have preconceived ideas of what should be happening.

I would like to make it so that actually all of the attendees are anonymous so that going forward any time we take a decision based on their recommendations there can be no recriminations for people that make those recommendations because some of them are likely to be unpopular with some elements of our community.

I would also like to make sure that those Citizen's Assemblies include a vast number of our school children. They are the people that are going to inherit our community in the future and we should be making decisions that are in the best interests of their future lives and for me that means involving them in the decisions that we should be taking.

37.5 Anne Chadwick asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

As part of the Council's commitment to planting 250,000 new trees, has Wokingham Borough Council considered applying for Tree Cities of the World status and cementing the roll of tree planting and maintenance in the Council's annual activities?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council is very keen to attain Tree Cities of the World status. In order for the Borough to achieve this status we must demonstrate that various standards have been met in relation to the protection, maintenance and planting of our trees.

The first step towards achieving this recognition in Wokingham is underway through the proposals to plant an additional 250,000 trees within the Borough. As part of these proposals to deliver this number of new trees and maintain our existing tree stock, we propose to develop a Wokingham Tree Strategy. This would set out how Wokingham could maximise the wide range of benefits that trees and woods can deliver in relation to health, amenity, climate change and water management. It will also explain how the Council could protect and maintain Council owned trees and how we will engage with asset holders in the Council, other landowners, and the community to protect all of the trees across the Borough. An action plan will be produced along with the Strategy, part of which will cover how we will work towards achieving the standards required for Tree Cities of the World status.

We intend to begin work on the Strategy as soon as the proposals are finalised and once worked up to a stage suitable for public consultation we would very much value feedback and input from residents, including plans to achieve Tree Cities of the World status.

You may also like to know that I have submitted a motion to the next full Council meeting which if voted on and agreed by Council would commit WBC to achieving Tree Cities of

the World status in the near future. Anybody interested in the Tree Cities of the World programme should visit: www.treecitiesoftheworld.org for some more information. It really is a fantastic programme that we want to be a part of.

Supplementary Question

It is great that we are committing to Tree Cities of the World status. What plans does Wokingham Borough Council have to deliver urban forestry rather than simply planting trees on existing open green land?

Supplementary Answer

That is a really great question because planting on existing green land is clearly one of the easiest options but actually urban trees and urban forests provide some of the greatest benefits of tree planting. They provide shade, they provide reduced wind speed, they reduce our peak temperatures, they improve our air quality, they lower pollution, they absorb carbon, they reduce noise, they reduce the risk of flooding and they also look quite nice.

So as part of our 250,000 plan to plant more trees there is a commitment for us that we want to plant more urban trees. We are calling it the "Garden Forest" project and a proportion of our 250,000 trees are being set aside for residents to effectively plant in their own gardens. So in the near future I am looking forward to announcing plans on how we are going to deliver that to our residents.

37.6 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Can you please tell me how much revenue the Council has lost from leisure and parking fees since the start of Covid?

Answer

The Council has suffered considerable financial pressure as a result of Covid-19 and the loss of the income is a considerable part of this.

We received a management fee income contribution under what was a very successful leisure management contract and it is estimated we will forgo approximately £200k of this this year. As for car parking the estimated loss of income is more significant at over £700k.

However the Council, amongst many other local authorities, have continued to make representations to the Government for reimbursement as to our lost income. This lobbying has been successful and I am pleased to say that a compensation scheme is now in place. This scheme reduces the residual cost to the Council of just over £300k but rest assured we will continue to pursue this to try and wipe out the £300k.

38. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

38.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

I note that the forward plan for WBC's Executive calls for discussion on the Housing Strategy 2020-2024: and the notice of proposed decision was first published: 27th August 2019.

The reason for consideration: To approve the Council's Housing Strategy for the next 3 years.

I also notice that the decision was deferred from November Executive in order that additional data regarding specialist housing can be accommodated and the decision is now due on 29th October 2020 by Executive. Reference Number: WBC1087.

The document in question is the Housing Strategy 2019 - 2022 and although there are many references to previous housing strategies on the Council's website it would appear that the key document Housing Strategy 2019 - 2022 is not mentioned.

My question is as a three year housing strategy, 2019-2022 is a crucial document that will require considerable thought and deliberation by Members and the public at large. Why has the Council not put it on the Council website so one can have proper sight of it?

Answer

I can confirm that there is confusion in the dates of our proposed new Housing Strategy and that is down to a good old fashioned administrative error.

As the Strategy was originally planned to be discussed at the Executive in November 2019 it was anticipated that the new Strategy would cover the period 2019 through to 2022. The discussion was subsequently deferred until this year and therefore the new Housing Strategy now covers 2020-24. Unfortunately the dates were not changed on the internal document control system.

I can confirm that the previous Housing Strategy, which ran from 2015-18, is available on the Council's website and it will be replaced by the new one, which will be 2020-24, once the final version is hopefully approved by the Executive in the new year following the consultation.

38.2 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Mental health issues do not discriminate. We are all potentially vulnerable. Yet, mental health issues remain a 'taboo' subject for many people. There is the potential for this 'taboo' to become even more so as people cope with increasing and varied forms of hardship resulting from the pandemic. I applaud the initiatives taken by WBC with Citizens Advice to expand mental health support. However, I am concerned that the cultural diversity, which is so important to our Borough, creates challenges when it comes to responding effectively to culturally specific mental health needs. Are there any specific concerns that WBC is particularly worried about regarding this matter and if so, how is WBC responding?

Answer

Whilst Covid-19 affects all of us, with respect to both physical and mental health, there is evidence that certain groups in the Borough are affected disproportionately. Physically,

those are older, deprived, male and from the BAME groups have a higher prevalence and poorer outcomes. In terms of mental health these groups will of course have a more direct impact from the disease itself and due to losing loved ones. However, there is also evidence that BAME, older isolated, carers, LGBTQ+ and young mothers have suffered from a higher level of distress than the population as a whole. As an example:

- BAME populations are disproportionately affected due to Covid-19. A survey of over 14,000 adults by the mental health charity Mind has revealed that existing inequalities have had a greater impact on the mental health of people from BAME;
- There is also a higher incidence of mental health issues in the LGBTQ+ community. A study by UCL and the University of Sussex in June noted an increase of 123% in crisis calls to the foundation during the pandemic;
- Nonpaid carers as well. The increased sense of isolation, the lack of face to face support and respite as well as anxiety related to caring for those at higher risk from Covid-19, has also had an impact on this group. 72% of carers said they had thought they had suffered poor mental health as a result of caring, prior to the pandemic.

These groups have been supported by the Community Response with welfare check calls to the vulnerable and to carers. Additional support for young mothers was put in place by WBC and Primary Care. (e.g. additional Health Visitor surveillance).

Whilst the key messages have gone to the population as a whole, in terms of advice and guidance, how to keep safe, and how to access support, the BAME Forum has been accessing and engaging specific groups to try and assist further. Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust jointly provides Community Mental Health Services in Wokingham Borough with Wokingham Borough Council and has BAME and LBGT leads and forums. The Trust are committed to improving access by hard to reach groups and are connecting to local community groups in Berkshire to assist people in accessing and navigating the mental health services systems.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for that response and for demonstrating that our Council is being proactive in this matter.

I am wondering, given the importance and complexities of culture and mental health, whether the Council could also consider a range of additional measures. For instance exploring further best practice in this area particularly in the context of Covid-19, innovative approaches to reach out and better understand some of the cross-cultural mental health issues and needs, and perhaps engaging with some of the specialist voluntary organisations with specific expertise in cross-cultural specificities of mental health?

Supplementary Answer

We are trying to be proactive and we are trying to listen as we go along and basically to make sure that we do the best job possible for all of our residents. If you would be so kind as to e-mail me with any suggested groups or approaches I would be more than happy to take it up with the relevant Officers and ask them to make sure that these people are included.

We try to design basically one approach for all but it is important to us that nobody is left behind and the views and opinions of all residents go into what we are doing. So please e-mail me directly and I will take it up with the Officers for you and I will be happy to come back to you on progress and seek your feedback.

38.3 Tahir Maher asked the Leader of Council the following question:

Question

A number of cities and towns, including Glasgow, Leeds and Cheshire, for example, have established 'Poverty Truth Commission'. Primarily, it empowers people living in poverty to work with local leaders to tackle poverty.

Ordinary people struggling with poverty are given a chance to relate their personal experiences by creating safe spaces for people to tell their stories and opportunities for those making and influencing decisions to listen.

With rising numbers of individuals and families in our Borough facing significant hardships as a consequence of the pandemic, which in some cases has the potential to do irreversible harm, the need to examine all potentially helpful courses of action becomes all the more urgent.

Is Wokingham Borough Council prepared to participate in the Poverty Truth Commission to build on a principle of collective decision-making to create meaningful and longer-term solutions and tackle poverty between those people with lived experience of poverty and those in positions of influence?

Answer

I covered much of your question in my statement previously however the Poverty Truth Commission work that has taken place in those towns and cities appears to have been a valuable way to bring individuals and organisations together in conversation seeking to achieve progress in addressing the complex issues of poverty.

Wokingham Borough is a great place to live and there is no place for poverty. Regardless of whichever statutory benchmark you look at regarding poverty and hardship, Wokingham still has one of the lowest rates in the country, but even if one person or one child does not have a fair and equal opportunity or need in our Borough that is too many and we are committed to fighting it in whatever form it takes, whether its homelessness, rough sleeping, fuel poverty or hunger.

The Council already strives to have meaningful engagement with our communities and to listen and act on feedback we receive. We fully support people to share their views and experiences and to be part of the decisions that impact them most.

We do this in various ways, through public consultation, facilitation of forums and through our involvement with residents' groups and direct community outreach work, such as our active participation in Norreys Community Group and the Tenants' Forum for example, where we seek to understand in detail the challenges that residents are facing and work with them to deliver positive outcomes. But we know there is always an opportunity to do more and as part of developing our strategic approach to addressing poverty, we will be exploring positive ways to engage with our communities, such as the approach taken by the Poverty Truth Commission which will form part of our considerations.

38.4 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Covid-19 is unquestionably having widespread and significant impacts on mental health everywhere, through increased exposure to stressors, loss of coping mechanisms for many, and reduced access to supports.

Awful 'vicious circles' and downward spirals are all too evident. For instance, issues such as unemployment, unexpected financial hardship, housing concerns and for those in work changing work practices to cope with, are contributing to poor mental health.

In turn, practical issues such as these make it harder to improve mental health and can prevent those who need support from seeking help. This include people of all ages.

What age specific strategies and actions does WBC have in place to identify and support the pandemic related mental health needs of rising numbers of our residents?

Answer

We are fully aware basically of the impact that Covid-19 is having on our residents' wellbeing. 15% of Wokingham residents have a formal diagnosis of depression. Over 40% of GP consultations relate in some way to mental health issues and there has been a doubling of people experiencing issues related to their wellbeing, from 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 and sadly this situation is likely to deteriorate further over the winter months.

The Borough's Community Response has reached out to those isolated and vulnerable. Adult Social Care has made over 6,000 initial welfare checks and some 16,000 follow up calls via the WBC and the Link Visiting Scheme and there have been 4,000 calls to the "One Front Door", supported by Wokingham Borough Council and Citizens Advice. The "One Front Door" takes calls of any nature, many of which impact on mental health. These initiatives are being repeated or stay in place over the next few months.

To bolster this further there are two further initiatives. We are doing a project with Earley Plus PCN and Citizens Advice to encourage residents to call the "One Front Door" if their wellbeing is suffering. Citizens Advice will try to resolve the underlying issues causing depression and anxiety, such as financial stress and relationship breakdowns. They can signpost to other specialist services.

In addition Wokingham Borough Council are sourcing a specialist voluntary sector partner to provide support to those suffering from mild to moderate mental health issues of any age. The specification includes Wellbeing Support Workers who will talk through issues over a number of sessions as well as signposting to groups and activities to support them. The organisation will take referrals from GPs, statutory or voluntary organisations. They will also be tasked to support the voluntary sector with mental health training, providing advice and support and it is hoped, and expected, that this service will be fully mobilised very early next year.

The statutory mental health service in Wokingham continue to provide services since the start of the pandemic. Services are being delivered via the telephone and on-line using the NHS One Consultation facility. There have been face to face contacts with PPE being used as and where necessary. There is an IPS worker supporting people into employment

within the service and residents can also access the employment services provided by Optalis.

This year Wokingham Borough Council has set up a Recovery College which provides courses and workshops for people with mental health needs and their carers. The courses are focussed on understanding mental health issues, managing mental health in a positive way and keeping well. Courses also provide life skill training and access to support to gain employment. These courses are open to the general public who can register themselves with the College.

The Council has run a project to coordinate and collate resources for use by the general public to manage their mental health and wellbeing. These resources are available for children and adults. Obviously the phone calls which I mentioned earlier are being targeted in particular to those shielding and our vulnerable who have been isolated during Covid. They are available on the Wokingham Borough Council website. The website also provides details on how to access Talking Therapies and formal community mental health services for those people with higher levels of need.

Supplementary Question

It sounds like we are doing a lot but we have children going outside the Borough to go to school and also residents who work outside the Borough. Are you talking to the councils around us as well to see what services they are providing and are these at the same level as us or different so benchmarking it?

Supplementary Answer

I now the DASS, Matt Pope, has regular meetings with colleagues and also has a mentor who basically is meant to encourage and develop his skills as many of the senior Officers will. I know discussions take place regularly between them about what we are doing and what can be learnt from what the mentor is doing and what other people are doing.

So we are open minded. We are trying to be proactive and offer something for everybody but we are not pretending for one second we have got all the answers and very much of this best practice elsewhere we want to know about and we can see it and we want to be doing it because we are absolutely committed to try and support all our residents during this difficult time.

38.5 Chris Bowring asked the Executive Member Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

Could the Executive Member for Highways and Transport give a brief summary of how the programme of road resurfacing in the Borough is progressing?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council has invested £6.1 million in its 20/21 road resurfacing programme, with over 100 roads earmarked for resurfacing or treatments to prolong their life. The roads have been selected based upon our comprehensive surveying of all of the Borough's roads by our Highways Teams and that means that we spend money on the roads which most need our attention.

Work originally scheduled to start in May was brought forward to early April, with the programme accelerated due to the Government's Covid-19 guidance. Road usage

dropped by more than 50% in the Borough during lockdown and roadworks by utility companies by more than 33%, providing us with an opportunity to complete work in potentially disruptive locations. These include the Showcase roundabout in Winnersh, the A4 Bath Road in Sonning, Finchampstead Road and Molly Millar's Lane in Wokingham and Thames Street in Sonning; a key route between Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

During the summer we completed a large programme of surface treatment works, including 11km of micro-asphalting on 67 streets and 17km of surface dressing on 22 streets. Surface dressing and micro-asphalt treatments are used to seal the existing road surfaces from water ingress and add texture to the road which enhances its skid resistance. Both these types of surface treatment will prolong the life of a road by ten years.

Alongside the 17 accelerated plane and inlay resurfacing schemes that were completed at the beginning of the year we have just started work on phase two of the plane and inlay resurfacing work and I anticipate that a further 13 streets will be resurfaced during this programme.

We have actually just completed Hartsbourne Road in Earley, Headley Road in Woodley, Betchworth Avenue in Earley and Rushey Way in Earley. We are just about to start on Great Lea in Three Mile Cross, Church Road in Swallowfield, Nine Mile Ride in Finchampstead and Davis Street in Hurst. We will then, in November and December, go to Crockhamwell Road in Woodley, Longwater Road in Finchampstead and Basingstoke Road in Swallowfield and Three Mile Cross. So as you can see we are really getting cracking on the structural maintenance.

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

Question

Carers give excellent value for money and we need to ensure they are getting the support they need. If the aspirations of the Carers' Policy are met is the budget going to be sufficient for the increased demand that there will be? I believe we all want to ensure we support this very important resource, one of many modes of support is to ensure that money follows an increased and improved service.

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council values the vital contribution that carers make to their local communities, particularly in these unprecedented times. We have 14,000 carers in Wokingham according to the last survey. We are fully aware of the pressures carers are under and since the pandemic part of our service has been to carry out welfare checks on our carers to ensure they have access to food, medication but also emotional support by linking them up with services in the Borough.

The Carers' Strategy gives direction as to how we will improve services for carers by fostering a more joined up approach across Adult Social Care and with our voluntary sector partners. Our Voluntary Sector Strategy and investment in that sector supports our carers.

Our aspirations for our carers will be realised by:

- a commitment to proactively work with the voluntary sector in developing joined up community prevention services;
- ensuring our duties continue to be met by the Care Act, this includes offering assessments for both the carer and cared for and where there is an eligible need ensuring services are in place to meet that need;
- continuing to support carers financially and emotionally through direct payments, commissioned home care, day services and respite for them.

In 2019/20 WBC spent the following to support carers:

- on the Carers' budget direct to the voluntary sector and for Dementia Care Advisors: £347,000;
- respite care
 - £516,000 for learning disability;
 - £12,000 for mental health;
 - £133,000 for older people;
 - £60,000 for people with physical disabilities; and
- direct payments to carers for their own needs: £56,000

We will continue to fund these needs defined by the Care Act. We are increasing our overall spend on carers in line with the Medium Term Financial Plan. There is funding to invest in the voluntary sector, including support for carers, as per our Strategy. There is funding to meet the anticipated demand. It is our expectation that we will fund £400k in 2021/22, £500k in 2022/23 and £600k in 2023/24 to support this. However obviously we will continue to look at this as it progresses and adjust this if needed.

Supplementary Question

You said, obviously, that you will work with voluntary services and Adult Social Care. How will you interact with the Health Service which is often very important both for the needs of the cared for and for the needs of the carer and make sure that you are working as a unity rather than individually?

Supplementary Answer

Yes it is a good question and it is actually a very important thing to do. Martin Sloan, our AD in Adult Services, regularly meets with the Health Service, all parts of it, to make sure this is all fed in. He is also responsible for the voluntary sector in Wokingham so there is a natural synergy there. I obviously have contacts with them as does the DASS, via the local Health and Wellbeing Board. We will work with them as much as we can because we recognise that the best partnership for residents is them and us working together basically not two separate organisations trying to provide one joined up service.

So we are fully committed to maintaining that level of conversation, maintaining that level of discussion and just listening to what they need and making sure we do the best possible thing we can for our residents.

38.7 Pauline Helliar-Symons had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question and in her absence the following written answer was provided:

Question

How much income has been received from the investment portfolio last year and how much profit after costs?

Answer

A lot of claims and mistruths have been made about our commercial investment endeavours, sometimes these have unfortunately appeared as headlines in the local papers. Given such statements you may be surprised to know that I am actually very proud of the work we have carried out with regard to our commercial investments. Making sensible, well thought out and considered investment decisions for the benefit of this Council and its community. Although it would be much easier for me to avoid any risk and innovation in discharging my role, I believe with a passion that this would be completely irresponsible of me. Commercial investments make vital income for the Council that keeps essential services going, so if they did not happen, services would have to be paired back or even closed.

During the last financial year (up to 31 March 2020) the portfolio of assets in the Property Investment Group generated £4.03 million in income, which equated to £1.34 million after deducting the cost of financing (interest) and a prudent debt repayment provision. As our portfolio grows, whether this be commercial properties or housing, we will see this income rise and continue to provide a vital income stream to the Council, at a time when other income sources are coming under considerable pressure or disappearing altogether.

38.8 Graham Howe asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

I believe our housing companies have in addition to delivering affordable homes they have made a profit if this is the case how much?

Answer

Through our housing companies we have indeed delivered much needed housing provision for our community and this is the objective that remains dear to my heart, as you will hear later. You will be aware that we have an ambition over the next four years to directly deliver 1,000 homes for our residents and make an income return for the Council taxpayer in doing this. The delivery of affordable housing and its financial return for the Council taxpayer can go hand in hand when properly managed.

It gives me great pleasure to inform you, that following considerable work undertaken over the past year, including streamlining what we do and making our delivery more efficient, the financial position of our Council housing has improved tremendously.

For year ending 31 March 2020, the companies reported as follows:

Wokingham Housing Limited	£650k profit
Loddon Homes Limited	£54k profit
Berry Brook Homes Limited	£15k profit
Wokingham Holdings	£62k loss
Giving a total profit of	£657k profit

This is up from a combined loss in the previous year of £508k thus meaning the position has improved by over £1.1m for the benefit of the Council taxpayers. I would like to thank all those on those company boards and the supporting Officers for their efforts in making this happen.

38.9 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

The Executive is about to put the draft Housing Strategy out to consultation (agenda item 44). The Strategy looks at housing priorities, and at how to deliver the maximum possible amount of affordable housing in the next four years.

Unfortunately, the Government has been consulting on proposals to reform the planning system. Their proposals include measures which would drastically reduce the Council's ability to deliver its proposed affordable housing, by:

- Exempting sites of less than 40 houses from any requirement for affordable housing;
- Setting proportions of affordable housing centrally instead of adjusting them for local need;
- Taking 25% of the affordable housing as homes for sale at a subsidised price instead of homes to rent;
- Dropping the ring-fencing of affordable housing infrastructure contributions.

If these proposals are implemented, what will be the impact on the deliverability of the Housing Strategy?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council have been very successful over the recent years in delivering high numbers of new affordable homes working with our own housing companies, housing association partners and developers. Through our last Housing Strategy we delivered 1,182 new affordable homes and, alongside our ambitious targets through the Housing 1-4-5 initiative, expect to deliver at least another 800 new affordable homes through the period of this new Strategy.

However there is no doubt that the Government's proposed reforms will reduce our ability to meet these targets and secure the much needed affordable housing for our residents and so have strongly objected to many of the Government's specific proposals.

For example, whilst we recognise the new First Homes proposals may be an affordable option for certain proportions of our residents we have objected strongly to the Government setting a requirement to provide them as 25% of any affordable housing provision on new sites. We strongly believe that decisions on the tenure of affordable housing should be made at a local level and we will make sure we try to address this priority with local needs.

The proposal to raise the threshold of the number of homes on any site where there is a requirement to provide affordable housing to 40 or 50 is also of significant concern. In Wokingham we have been successful in justifying affordable housing thresholds below the national minimum level and have adopted a lower threshold of five dwellings. This has not

resulted in any reduction in any new housing development in the Borough or, I would add, the profits for the developers.

We have also expressed concern that the value captured by the proposed new infrastructure levy will not be sufficient to cover the cost of the infrastructure, let alone infrastructure and affordable homes. It would be likely the Council would have to make a decision between the two rather than delivering the both which is, of course, unacceptable.

The summary of our view is there is no justification for developers to contribute less towards affordable housing, even on a temporary basis, whilst building new homes remains viable.

Therefore the Government should think again.

Supplementary Question

I absolutely agree with everything John has said. I do recognise it is awkward for you as a Conservative administration to be challenging a Conservative Government. Can you tell me what support you have had from the areas four MPs?

Supplementary Answer provided by the Leader of Council

You know that we have been in the forefront of opposing the Government's White Paper and I have had full support from all the four MPs, including our Labour MP. I have been quite stunned by the support they have all given us. You will have seen James Sunderland and Teresa May in Parliament.

So all I can say is so far so good. I have no idea where it is going to go but we have done our best and we will continue to do more I can promise.

38.10 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

The Revenue Monitoring report is still reporting problems with an overspend on home to school transport. If local children have not been attending schools during lockdown, why is there still an overspend in this area?

Answer

As a matter of fact the schools were open during the summer term. They were open for key workers' children and for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Addington was fully functioning all the time.

The Council has contracts with a number of providers to transport pupils to school and payments were made under the Cabinet Office's 'Procurement Policy Note - Supplier relief due to Covid-19' so that ensured that they were all kept in business so when we opened the schools for all children in September we did not have any problems with transport.

Supplementary Question

Some of these transport firms obviously it is good to keep them alive. I understand that and it is also that they have obviously made use of the furlough schemes and they have not been spending money on petrol. It would seem to me that especially as we have an overspend in that area, I understand that some of the schools were still teaching children,

but this money could have been used to support these children while they were at home rather than spending it on transport they are not going to use.

Supplementary Answer

Transport is done through a procurement system so if we had cancelled the contracts we would have had a great deal of problems in September because we would not have been able to have started and finished another procurement process and of course, as you say, some of them may have gone out of business as well if we had done that.

38.11 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

My question relates to Agenda item 38, in particular the Officer response to point 6 on page 35.

The Task and Finish Group was told that there would be an update in January 2021, as there was in January 2020.

A cross party Task and Finish Group has identified serious errors and gaps in the plan. The gaps and errors are not fixable by future innovations but relate to fundamental flaws in the composition and presentation of the plan.

Why has this issue not been properly addressed in the responses?

Answer

Officers welcome feedback on the Climate Emergency Action Plan and have worked positively with the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group to discuss the issues and recommendations in their report. The Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group is set to continue and Officers look forward to working with this Group to help deliver the outcomes of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

An initial, one off, report was presented to Council in January 2020 which outlined the priorities of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and set out the baseline carbon footprint of the Borough. This report also promised to deliver a detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan in July 2020 and provide an annual progress report to Council thereafter.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a working document which means that changes can and will be continually incorporated into the document. The Plan is comprehensively monitored on a three month basis and as promised the highlight report will be shared with the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group. Not only is progress monitored but changes in the methodology and form of the Plan will also be reported. The first highlight report will be ready to be shared in November. Going through the democratic process every six months will make additional demands on Officer resources and given the existing regular reporting mechanisms, and where we are with Covid, this may not be the best use of Officer time.

As suggested at the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group Members are encouraged to get in touch with Officers to have discussions about specific issues that they feel would improve the Plan. These will then be incorporated into the Action Plan on an ongoing basis.

The Climate Emergency Action Plan is a tool which is continuously being updated and helps give direction to what the residents, businesses, town and parish councils, charities and the Council need to do achieve net Zero Carbon by 2030.

The Plan is not the only method of measuring carbon emissions. The definitive measure of the performance for the Borough is through the Government's emissions data published annually by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy which will be used to calibrate our predictions and to ensure that they are on track.

Extensive consultation was undertaken during the development of the Plan. The Council received both positive criticism and also encouragement; including the Plan being described as best practice. The Council is ahead of the vast majority of other councils in attempting such a detailed plan and are regularly consulted for advice by other authorities while building their own action plans.

Supplementary Question

I think the fact is the reason those gaps and errors and omissions won't be corrected is because it is politically embarrassing. Now it is great to hear your newfound enthusiasm for Citizen's Assemblies which is a way of taking politics out of these plans. To do a Citizen's Assembly does cost money. Have you told John Kaiser how much a Citizen's Assembly, that you say you are planning, will cost?

Supplementary Answer

We are currently working through how we are going to run Citizen's Assemblies. We have had numerous discussions already and I am already talking with environmental groups across the Borough in terms of how we run them in partnership with them. I am not concerned in terms of the cost of running Citizen's Assemblies because it is an important thing for us to do and will help us address some of the challenges we currently face.

In terms of some of the gaps that are also in our Plan you will have seen the Prime Minister announce earlier this month that by 2030 all homes across Great Britain are going to be powered by offshore wind farms. Now domestic electricity accounts for 71,000 tonnes of our carbon footprint as a Borough. So that is 71,000 tonnes that we can now build into our carbon budget that we can remove from the work that we need to do and our Carbon Emergency Action Plan continues.

So you know I have always expected that our Action Plan is going to ebb and flow. I have always expected that at times we are going to have gaps and at other times we are going to be over our target. That is how things like this work especially from 10 years out.

So I am confident that we are going to be able to hit our target.

38.12 Abdul Loyes asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The creation of the Carers' Strategy and its priorities were developed with carers and providers in a collaborative way. Do you agree that this is a very successful and valuable approach to ensuring our residents are able to access the support they need and that we should look to apply this model to address other issues facing our communities?

Answer

I agree. The approach taken with the Carers' Strategy is an excellent example of how we can effectively work together with our partners in the voluntary sector and the community sector as well as our Health partners. We work in partnership with the NHS, the CCG and our local GPs alongside the voluntary sector who are also playing a vital role in tackling loneliness and mobility and it is hoped that this will also be expanded shortly into mental health.

Indeed this is how we have worked in our response to the pandemic emergency and this would be a very good approach to tackling the issues of poverty across the Borough.

Partnership has played a vital role in our response to the pandemic and residents can access a wide range of advice and support through the 'One Front Door' via Citizen's Advice Wokingham.

Our priority and focus at present must be on our response to the pandemic emergency, but that doesn't mean we are complacent about other issues facing our communities such as the issue of need and poverty.

Regardless of whichever statutory benchmark you look at regarding poverty and hardship Wokingham still has one of the lowest rates in the country. But even if one person or one child does not have fair and equal opportunity in our Borough that is too many and we are committed to fighting this.

We are already doing a lot to address this issue and we are not starting from scratch. For example we have made good progress in addressing the drivers of poverty, through maximising affordable housing, providing good quality Council housing and addressing homelessness and rough sleeping to ensure that people have access to safe and secure accommodation.

Another example is through our outreach work, often in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, we support our residents to lead self-sustaining lifestyles, including addressing food insecurity through initiatives such as Grub Club and Social Bites.

Notwithstanding this positive work that has been taking place and is being strengthened in response to the pandemic, we know we can do more to ensure that those who really need our support can get it.

We are therefore looking to establish and facilitate a partnership to tackle poverty, like the model used in the development of the Carers' Strategy which will also lead on developing a joint strategy for the Borough.

39. OFFICER RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Executive considered a report setting out the Officer response to the recommendations contained in the Climate Emergency Task and Finish review report which had been established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee.

The Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions reiterated the objective of the Task and Finish Group which was to scrutinise the emerging targets and key performance indicators within the Climate Emergency Action Plan and make

recommendations for any improvements that could further enhance the delivery of the Plan.

Councillor Murray highlighted that the Task and Finish Group's had found the Climate Emergency Action Plan to be a bold, ambitious document which was aligned to national best practice and underpinned by a significant, dedicated budget and clear governance structures. This governance structure included oversight from external expertise as part of the established Advisory Board, which was chaired by Transport Decarbonisation Director at the National Grid. The review also commended Officers for the significant progress made since the initial Action Plan was published in January 2020, particularly in light of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's day to day activities.

Members were advised that the Task and Finish Group had carried out a thorough review which had included external insight from Professor Paul Chatterton, a leading expert in climate change, at the University of Leeds and also written evidence from the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. Following the review the Task and Finish Group had made 14 recommendations. Councillor Murray went through the recommendations and the Officer responses in detail and it was noted that most of the recommendations had been accepted by Officers, subject to a few cases where additional reasoning had been added.

Councillor Murray further advised that once plans for the Green Bank were fully developed a report would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for review and input. He would also welcome Overview and Scrutiny scrutinising the impact of the Local Plan Update on climate emergency. Although this could only be once the impact of proposed Government policies had been finalised and worked through. In addition Councillor Murray confirmed that it was intended to publish details of land available for sequestration projects once town and parish council opportunities had been established.

On behalf of Officers and himself Councillor Murray thanked the members on the Task and Finish Group for their diligence and dedication in carrying out the review, their open mindedness to the information presented and for the quality and calibre of the recommendations. He also thanked those Officers who had been involved in drafting the review report and the covering report whom he felt deserved a huge amount of credit for their work.

RESOLVED: That the Officer responses to the recommendations contained in the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group report be approved.

40. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2020/21 - QUARTER 2

The Executive considered a report setting out the Revenue Budget position as at 30 September 2020.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report and highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on the General Fund balance which was shown as £12.431m as at 31 March 2020 and was now forecast to be £8.631m at 31 March 2021. The the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's General Fund balance was therefore £2.629m.

Councillor Jorgensen highlighted untrue stories in the press about the Council having a large deficit and being financially unstable and queried what the Executive Member believed was a prudent level of reserves. Councillor Kaiser felt that more than £7m was a

prudent level although he would prefer a level of over £10m. He advised that the Council was still working with the Government to try and gain additional support. It was noted that the Council's financial position could change if there was another lockdown and the Council was having to provide additional facilities, foods and services.

RESOLVED that the following be noted:

- 1) the significant financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis as illustrated in the Executive Summary and that any unfunded additional responsibilities falling on the Council as a result of any further lockdown measures are not included in the 2020/21 forecasts;
- 2) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report;
- 3) the recent announcement from the Prime Minister confirmed that there would be a further package of support for local government, of around £1 billion. Further details of this funding will be confirmed shortly. Any income and related expenditure from this is currently not factored in the figures in the report;
- 4) that on 22 September, the Council were allocated £55k from Local Authority Compliance and Enforcement Grant. Any income and related expenditure from this is currently not factored in the figures in the report.

41. CAPITAL MONITORING 2020/21 - END OF SEPTEMBER 2020

The Executive considered a report setting out the Capital budget position as at the end of September 2020.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report and highlighted changes from the previous quarter. These included bringing forward, from 2021/2022 into the current year, £6m of ringfenced funds to pay the Council's contribution to the Winnersh Relief Road and the addition of a flood alleviation scheme for Church Lane, Shinfield to be funded from a £115k ring fenced grant from the Environment Agency.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) it be noted that the Council's Capital Programme has been reviewed and will continue to be throughout the year in the context of the impact of Covid-19 on funding sources and service requirements, and that any changes will be presented to Executive for approval;
- 2) the proposed rephasing to the Capital Programme following the 'in-year' review including the impact of Covid-19, as set out in paragraph 3 and Appendix B, be noted and approved. There is no financial / service impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2021/2022;
- 3) the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 2 (to 30th September 2020), as summarised in the report and set out in detail in Appendix A, be noted;
- 4) Appendix C, which highlights capital performance by key activities, be noted. This is part of the Council's enhanced financial management focusing on the key capital

projects, monitoring performance against budget and impact on funding levels (including borrowing);

- 5) it be agreed that £6m of ringfenced funded capital budget, originally programmed for 2021/2022, is brought forward into the current year (2020/2021), for the acceleration of the delivery of the SCAPE – Road Infrastructure project;
- 6) an addition to the 2020/21 capital programme, the project for Church Lane, Shinfield – Flood Alleviation Scheme, to be funded from ring fenced Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) grant from the Environment Agency of £115k be noted and approved.

42. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY 2020-2024

The Executive considered a report containing a draft Housing Strategy which sets out the Council's vision for housing in Wokingham Borough from 2020-2024.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing highlighted the importance of people having decent housing and the change this made to people's lives. Councillor Kaiser advised that the Council had reduced the number of homeless people in the Borough, there were currently no rough sleepers and the number of people on the housing waiting list was the lowest of the neighbouring authorities with the number of people with real need being matched by the number of affordable homes that had been built over the last few years. It was noted that the number of Band 1 homes was currently 151 and Band 2 was 104.

Councillor Kaiser also highlighted the work of the Housing Companies which had delivered affordable housing across the Borough, and which were embarking on a £100m scheme to deliver 240 homes on Gorse Ride, as well as making a profit which could be reinvested in Council services.

The Leader of Council thanked Councillor Kaiser and the Deputy Chief Executive for the work they done to dramatically reduce homelessness and the work undertaken on rough sleepers.

RESOLVED: That consultation on the Wokingham Borough Council's Draft Housing Strategy 2020-2024 be approved.

43. WBC CARERS STRATEGY 2020-2025

The Executive considered a report setting out the Council's proposed Carers' Strategy for 2020-2025 which had been produced following extensive consultation and engagement with carers, young carers, providers and internal stakeholders.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services informed the meeting that there were currently 14,000 carers within the Borough; of which 230 were under 16 and 489 between 16-24 years old. On average these carers were undertaking their caring duties for 19.5 hours per week with 2,300 carers providing over 50 or more hours per week of care. It was noted that the Council was currently spending around £402k per annum in support and £690k on residential respite.

Councillor Margetts advised that the aim of the Strategy was to try and provide direction and improve the lives of carers including enabling carers to have a life outside of caring.

The Strategy had been produced in consultation with the Council's partners in the voluntary sector and it was hoped that the following outcomes would be achieved:

- increased identification of carers;
- carers supported to access community assets;
- improved and more accessible information and advice to carers;
- reduced loneliness and isolation;
- improved physical and mental wellbeing of carers;
- improved life chances for young carers;
- better support for working carers; and
- carers enabled to take a break.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council's Carers' Strategy 2020-2025, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.