



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

21 SEPTEMBER 2020 to 29 OCTOBER 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 11 November 2020



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Ken Miall (Chairman), Abdul Loyes (Vice-Chairman), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Jenny Cheng, Guy Grandison, Clive Jones, Adrian Mather, Alison Swaddle and Jim Frewin

Others Present

Malcolm Richards
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Nick Durman, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
Kevin Barnes, Contractor Support Officer, Thames Valley LPC
David Dean, Chief Executive Officer, Thames Valley LPC
Nicky Lloyd, Acting Chief Executive, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust
Victoria Parker, Director of Communications, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

13. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a future date.

Councillor Jones noted that in the supplementary answer provided by Councillor Margetts to the public question asked, Councillor Margetts indicated that official recognition would be given to care home staff for their hard work during the Covid 19 pandemic. He questioned whether this had happened. It was agreed that this would be followed up.

Councillor Jones commented that he had proposed that the Committee formally recognise the fantastic job that the Wokingham Borough Council staff had done in dealing with the pandemic. He suggested that a letter be produced from the Chairman on behalf of the Committee.

15. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Jones declared a Personal Interest in item 20 Building Berkshire Together - hospital building programme, on the grounds that he had recently been elected to the Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Trust Board of Governors. He was due to assume this role in November. He also declared a Personal Interest in this item on the grounds that a family member worked at the hospital.

Councillor Frewin declared a Personal Interest in item 20 Building Berkshire Together - hospital building programme, on the grounds that a family member worked at the hospital and also as he was a First Responder.

Councillor Bishop Firth declared a Personal Interest in Item 18 Pharmacy Service, Item 19 Dental Services and item 21 Update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, on the ground that her father in law was in a care home within the Borough.

16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

17. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

18. PHARMACY SERVICES

Kevin Barnes, Contractor Support Officer, Thames Valley LPC, and David Dean, Chief Executive Officer, Thames Valley LPC provided a presentation on pharmacy services during the pandemic.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) was a statutory body and was the local organisation for community pharmacy, covering Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. It was an independent, representative group and not for profit. The local LPC was a very small team.
- A very small amount from prescriptions went towards to the LPC's upkeep and some of the money from those funds went towards the national negotiating committee that worked with the Department of Health and the NHS to help negotiate national services such as the flu jab service.
- The LPC worked with NHS England Area Teams, the CCGs, local authorities and other healthcare services to help plan local healthcare services.
- The LPC negotiated and discussed pharmacy services with commissioners and was available to give advice to local pharmacy contractors and others. It liaised closely with their medical equivalents the Local Medical Committee so that GPs and pharmacists could work together to deliver the best services to patients.
- It was confirmed that pharmacy funding was received from the Department of Health.
- David Dean advised Members that during the pandemic 95% of pharmacies had been open consistently. There had initially been some issues around staffing and ensuring staff safety and that customers queued safely.
- Community and ensuring a good service for local residents was a massive part of what pharmacy did. Many pharmacists knew and understood their patient base.
- Pharmacists could offer advice to the public and training for pharmacists was rigorous.
- There were 264 pharmacies in Thames Valley, 72 of which were in Berkshire West.
- Councillor Frewin asked about what impact the pandemic had had on pharmacy. David Dean stated that lockdown had been somewhat of a surprise to pharmacy, as with many other services and initially the service had been quite overwhelmed. Patients had wanted to make sure that they had sufficient medication and some pharmacies had received scripts for much larger amounts than usual, which had created issues with supply chains. Some pharmacies had struggled with regards to manpower if staff became ill or had had to care for children who were out of school. Many initial issues had been resolved by April and May.
- Members were advised that pharmacy had been given £300 per pharmacy to cover Covid measures such as putting up plastic screens in the stores. The Pharmacy Funding model was complex; the pharmacy had to pay in advance for stock and only received payment 3 months after a prescription for the relevant medication was presented. Many pharmacies were in debt. Whilst the Government had advanced funds for 2 months, these funds would need to be repaid. In Oxfordshire 5% of all pharmacies had been lost in the last 4 months due to financial pressures.
- Councillor Frewin went on to ask about pharmacy involvement in Track and Trace and was informed that there was none.

- In response to a question from Councillor Frewin, regarding plans for a vaccine against Covid 19, David Dean stated that in terms of preparedness, pharmacy had been working hard to prepare for a possible second wave of the virus. It was not known when a vaccine would be available but pharmacy would be on the front line with other health services, helping to deliver any vaccine as it became available.
- A strong flu season was expected and 20,000 vaccines had already been delivered in the first two weeks, approximately double usual figures. Whilst the Government had promised additional flu vaccines for later in the year, it was possible that there may still be supply issues.
- Councillor Bishop Firth asked about flu vaccinations in care homes. Kevin Barnes commented that about 20% of flu vaccines had been delivered already and 86% of those had been given to those over aged over 65. He was unsure at present how many of these had been delivered in care homes and how many had been delivered to walk in patients in pharmacies. GPs took primary responsibility for delivering flu vaccines within care homes.
- David Dean emphasised that this year a 100% take up of flu jabs amongst care home staff was encouraged. It was important that care home managers made sure that their staff took up this offer. He suggested that this was something that the Council could help to publicise and encourage. The previous year approximately half of staff had received a flu jab.
- Councillor Bishop Firth asked whether flu jabs were free for care home staff and was informed that they were. They were also free for all domestic carers, shielded patients and those living in the same household.
- Councillor Jones asked whether any pharmacies in the Borough had closed recently. David Dean commented that Lloyds in Woodley had closed in February. Pharmacy was under great financial pressure, like many other businesses and funding had not changed for the last 6 years.
- Councillor Loyes asked how many pharmacies there were in Wokingham and how pharmacy locally could cope with future demand, should some pharmacies go out of business, and the local population increased. It was confirmed that there were 21 pharmacies in the Borough. David Dean stated that the way that people got their prescriptions was changing and there was a big push, in particular from some of the larger companies, to move online. It was important that those services which could not be offered online were continued to be supported and also all those patients who did not have access to online facilities.
- Councillor Loyes asked how LPC worked with contractors. David Dean stated that it represented all contractors and was there to provide help and support.
- Councillor Swaddle questioned whether pharmacists were considered key workers with regards to receiving priority tests for Covid 19. She was informed that they were.
- In response to a Member question about staff levels during the pandemic the Committee was informed that there was a healthy locum population. PPE had been an issue initially but was now less so. David Deans thanked the volunteer groups in Wokingham for their assistance in delivering prescriptions during lockdown.
- Councillor Mather asked about the continued provision of nomad packs. David Dean indicated that the making up of nomad packs was complex and time consuming. It was important that those who needed them continued to receive them. However, it was possible that some patients who had received them in the past may not have had all other possible alternative options, such as large print labels, discussed with them. In addition, NICE and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society advice was that if medication was removed from its original packaging it was no longer possible to guarantee its efficacy. Councillor Mather asked who

Councillors could contact should a resident complain about the removal of the nomad pack service. David Dean stated that every community pharmacy had access to an assessment form. A pack had also been put together to help contractors to make decisions. Nomad packs and free prescription delivery were undertaken on a purely goodwill basis by the individual pharmacies.

- Members were informed of the LPC website. Kevin Barnes and David Dean agreed to come back to a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Kevin Barnes and David Dean be thanked for their presentation;
- 2) the presentation be noted.

19. DENTAL SERVICES

Members were asked to submit questions on the report which could be sent to the relevant officers.

It was agreed that this item would be deferred.

20. BUILDING BERKSHIRE TOGETHER - HOSPITAL BUILDING PROGRAMME

Nicky Lloyd, Acting Chief Executive, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and Victoria Parker, Director of Communications, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust provided a presentation on Building Berkshire Together – hospital building programme.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Nicky Lloyd thanked those who had supported the RBH during the pandemic. She referred to people bringing in hot food so that staff could have hot food breaks, volunteers sewing scrubs, the use of a bus service provided by a local school, and the delivery of prescriptions when RBH had moved to virtual clinics, amongst other initiatives.
- The Building Berkshire Together development programme was a once in a generation opportunity.
- Victoria Parker stated that the Foundation Trust hoped to receive funding to develop a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to develop its estate, and if that went successfully through the Treasury and Department of Health and Social Care, an outline business case would be developed and further engagement would take place with key stakeholders and communities. A further business case would then be developed. This process, if successful, would take a number of years.
- Under the Government Health Infrastructure Plan, (HIP), funding would be provided for 40 new hospital projects over the next ten years. The Trust was one of 21 NHS Trusts to receive seed funding of £2million to develop ideas. All possibilities would be considered. It was a major opportunity for the Trust and for the local communities and staff to improve services, patient experience and the environment.
- Victoria Parker set out the case for change:
 - Condition – much of the buildings and building fabric was in poor condition, the estate having been built over a long period. The CQC, after a recent visit, whilst it had applauded the level of care provided, had had some concerns regarding the condition of some of the buildings.
 - Capacity – the demographic was growing and the population ageing. It was important that the buildings were fit to meet future needs.

- Capability – the Trust was a good place to work but could be better. Redevelopment would create an opportunity for first class training and development and attract more staff. The existing buildings were designed to support an 18th and 19th century model of clinical care and limited the capability of staff to provide high quality modern healthcare for the local communities.
- Climate – the Trust was committed to the green agenda but the current estate was not environmentally friendly and was expensive to run. Buildings needed to have green spaces to improve the quality of environment and to reduce the Trust’s carbon emissions.
- Catalyst – the Trust as an anchor institution had a desire to develop its strategic partnerships and to play its part in the economic development of communities.
- Supporting the care closer to home agenda and ensuring that patients had to travel less, was important.
- The Trust was currently at the development of the SOC stage. Input had been received from the ONS population, internal feedback from staff and engagement with stakeholders.
- Possible scenarios included:
 - Refurbishment and some rebuilding on the existing site – parts of the buildings were not fit for purpose.
 - Some refurbishment and substantial rebuilding on the current site.
 - Completely new hospital on the current site.
 - Completely new hospital on a new greenfield or brownfield site. The Trust would want to retain adjacencies with partners such as the University of Reading and also travel plans would need consideration.
 - Other partial or additional scenarios.
- Each scenario had pros and cons covering a range of areas;
 - Adjacencies
 - Environment
 - Economy
 - Speed
 - Compliance
 - Cost
 - Convenience
- Next steps in the process were outlined. Further engagement would take place with key stakeholders and unique features such as the relationship with the Life Sciences Park, identified. The SOC would be developed and delivered in Autumn and whatever option was preferred would need to fully align with the Trust’s Vision 2025 and beyond.
- Members were informed that the Trust had an engagement microsite. There had been around 3000 visits to the site so far and approximately 10% of those visits had translated into the completion of surveys outlining what people did and did not want for the future. The Committee was encouraged to provide their views via the microsite.
- Councillor Jones questioned whether the Trust wished to become a teaching hospital as this was a good way of training and retaining good quality staff. Nicky Lloyd commented that it did. Strong alliances with the University of Reading were already in place. In addition, two specialities had achieved excellence in terms of teaching and research and the standards set for them by the university. The hospital already hosted students from the Deanery, on their placements and rotations. Creating a medical school would take time but was a proven model of

- successful delivery. Research and the ability to be involved in teaching to broaden their professional scope, was attractive to many staff.
- Councillor Jones asked how much the different scenarios would cost and also where a new hospital would be located should the option of building a new hospital on either a greenfield or brownfield site, be progressed. Nicky Lloyd stated that the funding process was lengthy, although Alok Sharma was working with the Trust to try to reduce this. The Trust was currently working on the SOC and all different options from a minor refurbishment to a full rebuild in a different location, had to be set out as part of that. The different possible scenarios all had hugely different indicative costs and the SOC would help to establish what funding would be available and the Treasury's views on what would be financially achievable. It was important that the built environment supported the clinical strategy. Nicky Lloyd went on to say that in terms of alternative sites, there were no fixed views of where might be suitable. However, planning requirements would be key to any considerations.
 - Councillor Frewin asked that his thanks be passed on to staff for the hard work that they had undertaken in the pandemic.
 - Councillor Frewin commented that the hospital's current location was good for those travelling to the hospital by public transport but less so for those travelling by car. Parking was already an issue and he felt that this would worsen as the local population grew and if the site was extended. Nicky Lloyd stated that the area was one where significant growth was projected in terms of population, patient and traffic size.
 - Active engagement was taking place with users of all six of the Trust's sites about reducing the impact on the environment and providing alternatives. During the pandemic, many appointments were virtual and a lot of activity was moved away from the main Reading site to other sites in order to dilute the volume of visitors. Work was also being undertaken with staff on reducing car usage where possible. Staff could purchase a bicycle through the payroll deduction scheme. Shower block and changing facilities on site were being refreshed to help encourage more green travel. Many patients would still need to use private vehicles and one of the requirements of whatever change was made to the estate, was that sufficient site flow was in place.
 - Members were informed of the new app which helped to triage people before they came to A&E.
 - Deliveries were coordinated so that they did not take place during rush hours.
 - During the pandemic the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council had made a number of parking spaces available to staff on the streets of Reading, in the Queen's Road car park and on the Whiteknights campus. It was hoped that some of this could be continued.
 - Victoria Parker stated that travel and transport were always controversial issues when looking to make changes. An informal consultation was being carried out with staff to establish those who absolutely needed to bring their cars, for example if they were travelling between sites for clinics. This work was ongoing.
 - Councillor Frewin emphasised that the hospital ran 24 hours a day so park and ride was not appropriate for those working out of hours.
 - Councillor Bishop Firth commented that the current site was not overly accessible. She asked how much the Trust could make a case that a site that was accessible by green transport and public transport, was important. With regards to accessibility, Nicky Lloyd indicated that Access Able had been engaged to review accessibility of the signage, steps and ramps and wayfinding on arrival at the

building. Covid had meant that arrival times and appointment times had been more spread out than usual.

- Members were asked to feed back any particular routes around the hospital which were problematic for traffic.
- Councillor Mather referred to his own personal experience of the Reading site. He agreed that the fabric was not fit for purpose in parts and referred to nurses not being able to fit into a corridor at one time due to the narrowness of the corridor.
- Councillor Mather emphasised that he felt that the Trust should be ambitious. He questioned whether consideration had been given to becoming a major incident hospital. Nicky Lloyd confirmed that currently major trauma cases were either sent to London, Oxford or Southampton. The Trust was trying to be ambitious and to secure the maximum amount of funding available to it. She outlined the likely timescale for the process. Depending on the scale, plans could take up to 8 to 10 years to come to fruition, although work was being carried out to try to expedite this.
- On the microsite, questions were being asked as to what people did and did not want to see from their future hospital, such as whether there should be a hot and a cold site; one site able to do elective work and planned orderly work, and another site that dealt with emergencies and urgent care provision.
- The Trust had been actively looking for additional funding and had recently secured £4.5million to help enlarge the existing emergency department, creating additional cubicles for majors and paediatrics and increasing the size of the waiting area.
- Members were informed that the Committee had also applied for an early draw down of funding from the HIP2 scheme. Funding had been secured to help de-steam the site and move over to a green boiler by March 2021.
- Input was being sought from the commissioners both local, regional and national about what services would be required going forwards.
- In response to a Member question regarding engagement with the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Nicky Lloyd stated that they had recently spoken with James Kent, Executive Lead of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (ICS) and Accountable Officer of the three Clinical Commissioning Groups, who was undertaking a review of the structure and commissioning arrangements required.
- The Trust was working closely with the Primary Care Network and during the pandemic, the TICC-19 Pathway Triage had been developed which brought together the early diagnosis of Covid and created virtual wards of patients suspected of having Covid. Relationships between different branches of the health service had been greatly strengthened.
- Councillor Grandison stated that he would prefer a new hospital on a greenfield site as the current site had some challenges.
- Nicky Lloyd commented that one of the greatest challenges of a substantial rebuild would be the phasing of the project and the minimising of the disruption to staff and patients.
- Councillor Grandison asked whether PFI funding had been included. Nicky Lloyd indicated that the Trust would not look to go down an expensive loan finance route. Other routes might be considered such as joint ventures.
- Councillor Grandison questioned what councillors could do to support the project. Victoria Parker stated that support from them as key stakeholders was welcomed. She encouraged the Committee to provide their feedback via the microsite or via a letter. The Committee agreed that a letter of support would be produced.

- In response to a question from Councillor Loyes, regarding population growth, Nicky Lloyd indicated that population health management data was used to help model projections. Data was also provided by the local authorities.
- Councillor Frewin commented that he hoped that the process took less than 8-10 years as the need for an improved hospital facility was urgent.
- Councillor Jones questioned when the consultation would finish. Victoria Parker reemphasised that the SOC would be submitted in early October but the Trust would be seeking further input as it sought to refine its plans.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Nicky Lloyd and Victoria Parker be thanked for their presentation
- 2) the presentation be noted.
- 3) the Committee produce a letter of support and that Members of the committee complete the survey on the Trust's microsite.

21. UPDATE ON WORK OF HEALTHWATCH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

Members received an update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough from Nick Durman, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The way Healthwatch worked had had to change during the pandemic, as face-to-face engagement had not been possible. It had engaged with its voluntary and community sector partners throughout the pandemic. Nick Durman referred to the twice-weekly meetings held with CLASP which were held via Zoom.
- A number of residents had indicated that they had difficulties accessing timely and accurate information about health services, particularly dental services.
- Members were informed that some people who had hearing difficulties and needed to lip read had had trouble with accessing services, with the need for people to wear face coverings.
- It was agreed that an additional Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting would be arranged to hear a further update from Healthwatch.
- Councillor Bishop Firth indicated that the British Medical Council had recently passed two Motions relating to health inequalities in the BME and transgender communities. She questioned if the Committee could review how these groups were served. Councillor Miall questioned whether the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board would review this area.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted and that an additional meeting of the Committee be scheduled to receive a further update.

22. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- An additional meeting of the Committee would be scheduled for October.

- Whilst it was appreciated that a written report had been provided on dental services Members requested that officers be invited to the next meeting to provide the presentation if possible.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committees were reviewing the Council's response to Covid. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had received information on the Council's response to Covid in relation to care homes and would review how the Council had worked with its health partners. Councillor Swaddle indicated that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee would be pulling together the findings of all the scrutiny committees.
- Councillor Swaddle indicated that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be receiving an update on CAMHS and that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee members would be invited to this.
- Nick Durman suggested that the Committee might wish to look at population health management in future.
- Councillor Bishop Firth commented that there had recently been an article in the Wokingham Paper regarding a case dating back to 2015 where an elderly man had had a maggot infested wound. She wanted assurance that the action plan was being followed up. It was confirmed that whilst the Committee did not follow up individual cases, assurance could be sought regarding the processes in place.
- Jim Frewin requested a briefing paper on ambulance response times to enable Members to assess whether this was something which should be further reviewed by the Committee.
- Councillor Swaddle commented that in future briefing sessions for the Committee should be opened up to all Members.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

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Decision made in the presence of:
 Nigel Bailey, Interim Assistant Director - Housing & Place Commissioning
 Ian Bellinger, Category Manager for Growth and Delivery
 Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION RECORD SHEET IMD 2020/12
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Title of the report	Changes to the current planning system consultation
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith
ACTION BY Director, Place and Growth - Chris Traill
DECISION MADE ON 22 September 2020

Recommendation contained in the report

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Enclosure 1 as this Council's response to the government consultation 'Changes to the current planning system' (MHCLG, August 2020).

Decision

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agreed that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Enclosure 1 as this Council's response to the government consultation 'Changes to the current planning system' (MHCLG, August 2020).

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comments received.
Monitoring Officer	No comments received.
Leader of the Council	Minor comments received and incorporated into the report.

Reasons why the report was deemed to have contained confidential or Exempt information (if applicable)

N/A

Any Conflict of interest declared by any Executive Member who is consulted by a Member which relates to the decision

None

Any dispensation granted by the Head of Paid Service in respect of any declared conflict of interest

None

Background papers

Report

Enclosure: Recommended response

PUBLISHED ON: 22 September 2020

EFFECTIVE ON: 30 September 2020

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 29 September 2020

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERSONNEL BOARD
HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), Lindsay Ferris, Pauline Helliar-Symons and Simon Weeks

Officers Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Sarah Swindley, Lead Specialist HR

9. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Carl Doran, John Kaiser and Clive Jones.

10. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board 3 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at a future date.

11. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

12. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

13. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

14. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

15. AGENCY WORKER USAGE

The Board received an update on agency worker usage.

RESOLVED: That the update on agency worker usage be noted.

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MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.10 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones and Abdul Loyes. Pauline Helliari-Symons attended the meeting as a substitute.

Executive and Deputy Executive Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) and Michael Firmager (Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure)

Officers Present

Dave Allen (Communications, Engagement & Marketing Manager), Nick Austin (Interim Assistant Director – Customer and Localities), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Joelle Cooper (Senior Specialist, HR), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive), Damon Emes (Head of Investments), Bernie Pich (Assistant Director – Strategic Property and Commercial Assets), Martin Sloan (Head of Service – Community Care Services), Sarah Swindley (Lead Specialist, HR) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

28. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Oliver Whittle and Keith Baker.

Pauline Helliari-Symons attended the meeting as a substitute for Keith Baker.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were submitted from Abdul Loyes and Clive Jones for agenda items 33 and 36, on the grounds that they had volunteered for aspects of the community response. Both would engage in discussions relating to these items.

A declaration of interest was submitted from Paul Fishwick for agenda items 33 and 36 on the grounds that his wife had volunteered for aspects of the community response. Paul added that he would engage in discussions relating to these items.

30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

31. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

32. PROPERTY INVESTMENT GROUP - COVID 19 IMPACT

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 14, which outlined the initial impacts to Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) property investment group as a result of the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

The report outlined the basis for the Property Investment Group (PIG), including the origins of the group and decision making process. The report stated that the commercial investment fund represented about half of the Council's overall property business. Historically the Council's property exposure had been relatively modest compared to many

other local authorities but it had grown significantly in the last 5 years through delivery of our Regeneration and Commercialisation agendas. The Commercial Property Team was currently responsible for managing approximately £8.0m p.a. rental income split across the three key portfolios: Regeneration, Operational and Investment.

Around 75% of investments (approximately £3.3m per annum) were secured against institutional calibre tenants who were thriving at present. With all debt taken into account, WBC would see approximately a £400k per annum profit based only on institutional calibre tenants when secure debt was subtracted from the overall figures. Any surplus was used to fund other Council services. WBC's approach was validated by reputable external agencies who looked at assets and performance. WBC only invested for the long term, and the situation as presented within the report would only get better with the current holdings, as debt would reduce towards 0 over a 40 year investment period.

The PIG focussed on prudent investments, with tenants such as supermarkets. There was a targeted return of 5% on 1000 homes built by WBC over a 5 year period. This was an example of how the PIG could be used to regenerate parts of the Borough in a positive way, whilst allowing for a financial return to fund other Council services.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive), Bernie Pich (Assistant Director – Strategic Property and Commercial Assets), and Damon Emes (Head of Investments) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Were smaller, independent units within the Wokingham Town centre covering the interest on the investment debt with their rents? In addition, how many units had to become vacant for the loan interest to no longer be covered by rental income? Officer response – At present, the rental income was covering the interest on the loans. It was felt that Wokingham deserved to be different with a variety of smaller firms within the town centre. Many other areas had an abundance of units, and Wokingham was currently bucking the trend in terms of vacant units. Specific information regarding vacancy rates and rental returns would be circulated to the Committee after the meeting.
- What was balance of the Council's rental income from the three different portfolios? Officer response received after the meeting –

WBC Commercial Property rental income (£p.a.) by portfolio, September 2020

Investment	£4.6m	50%
Regeneration	£2.9m	32%
Estates	£1.7m	18%
TOTAL	£9.2m	100%

Note: the report to O&S Committee included a figure of approx. £8.0m taken from the Council's Covid Rent policy document published March 2020. Since then the Investment portfolio has added one new asset with 6 new income streams, the Regen team has completed a number of new agreements/leases and the Estates team has continued to actively manage multiple income streams across four trading estates. The picture is constantly moving, in the right direction.

- Had WBC purchased, or were in the process of trying to purchase, any additional commercial units? Officer response – This was a commercially sensitive area, however officers were always looking to discharge the work of the policy.
- Was the food store property referred to on agenda page 8 classed as an institutional level client? Officer response – Careful covenant checks had been carried out, and in this instance the client had sold a variety of properties and leased them back to inject liquidity into the business.
- £85m had been invested to date, when would the remaining money likely be invested? Officer response – Officers were not under compulsion to commit further funds at any particular time, and the underlying Council policy was to enhance the Council's income stream.
- Was there any concern with regards to the uncertainty of the property market? Officer response – This was a complex area, and the circumstance of each business was taken into account on an individual basis.
- Were there any concerns regarding turnover based businesses providing rent? Officer response – Only one turnover based business was within the scheme, and this was the WBC owned Denmark Street car park. Although this was performing poorly at the moment, it was hoped that this would pick up in future.
- How many leases were at risk at present? Officer response – There were a number of portions of income streams of tenants under leases. The focus was on supporting tenants throughout this difficult period through to the other side.
- Was the scheme formed of investments that could withstand these difficult times? Officer response – In the context of the wider economy, the PIG and its investments were in a solid position, and officers were currently pleased and in a position to keep making positive forward steps.
- To what extent were retail units expected to sustain rents of pre C-29 levels? Officer response – High street units were key areas of concern, however people still wanted physical interaction with certain products and there was a place for these retailers post C-19.
- To what extent was increased Government interest in Local Authority investments a concern for WBC? Officer response – It was fair to say that the Government had a heightened interest in Local Authorities commercial investment schemes, as some Local Authorities had practiced a more extreme approach towards their investments. WBC practiced a safe and prudent approach towards our investments, and WBC were most certainly at the prudent end of all Local Authorities who were commercially investing. Most recently the Government had stipulated that you could not borrow outside of your boundaries. WBC were already borrowing using our own money, and there was not an intention to invest outside of the Borough in future. Investing within the Borough boundaries allowed WBC more control, and allowed development of schemes such as affordable housing for our residents.
- What was the debt recovery strategy for tenants who were not currently paying? Officer response – During the pandemic, it became unlawful for landlords to use conventional recourses to get tenants to pay their rent. This had severely reduced the

powers WBC had to encourage tenants to pay rent. The current approach involved creating and maintaining positive relationships with our tenants, whilst constantly assessing the risks. Currently, over 80% of rental collection was still being maintained.

- Could more detail be provided regarding the term “flight to quality”? Officer response – This term referred to investors moving towards food stores and logistics companies as very popular investments. These industries were at the core of WBC’s portfolio and this could be seen as a positive benefit at present.
- Should loan interest rates be increased, what effect would this have on WBC? Officer response – The public works loan board had increased rates by 1% overnight, however it was probable that in the long term the interest rates would go down. WBC were in a flexible position by having access to multiple sources of funding, in addition to our own internal funds.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Graham Ebers, Bernie Pich, and Damon Emes be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) Information regarding the balance of the Council’s rental income from the three different portfolios, and information regarding the regeneration income to debt query be included in the minutes;
- 3) The report, questions, and responses be used within the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee’s overall report on WBC’s initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

33. COVID-19 RESPONSE - STAFF REDEPLOYMENT

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 15 to 24, which outlined the staff redeployment process put in place as part of Wokingham Borough Council’s (WBC’s) initial response to the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

The report stated that a cross directorate approach was taken, by quantifying and identifying the key needs within the organisation. A framework document was created, and the project was supported by the corporate leadership team. The key to the whole process was all directorates working together, whilst understanding the needs of each specific service and redeploying staff from service areas who had capacity. Training support was provided to staff prior to redeployment where required. At the peak, 107 members of staff were redeployed across the organisation, and going forwards WBC now had a framework and skills tracker in place should the need arise once more.

Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive), Sarah Swindley (Lead Specialist, HR) and Joelle Cooper (Senior Specialist, HR) attended the meeting to answer any Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- The Committee wished to thank all members of staff who had been redeployed, thereby ensuring service continuity for WBC and its partners;
- Were there any plans to continue collaboration with third party organisations post C-19? Officer response – This was an area which officers were looking in to. During the

pandemic, WBC had fostered some really strong positive relationships, and this would be continued as part of WBC's continuous improvement programme;

- Were there any redeployed staff who may not return to their original role for some time? Officer response – There were currently 4 redeployed staff within the organisation, and officers were working closely to assess whether there was a longer term need, and how to resource that need. These areas would be looked at under the continuous improvement programme, and some permanent changes may be a positive outcome in the long term;
- How were the funds found for additional payments to staff operating in a role with a higher grade than that of their original role? Officer response – The budgetary areas were complex, and answers to issues such as this would be better answered during the Committee's annual review of the medium term financial plan;
- The more WBC could do to hold onto collaborative working, both internally and with our partners, the better the service that could be provided for our residents.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Graham Ebers, Sarah Swindley and Joelle Cooper be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The report, questions, and responses be used within the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's overall report on WBC's initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

34. COVID-19 - COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT RESPONSE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 25 to 32, which outlined Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) initial response with regards to communications and engagement to the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

This report summarised how WBC sought to support the community through the pandemic with timely and targeted communications, including a focus on particular groups such as the elderly, the BAME community, and people with underlying health conditions. Methods of communication included social media, printed flyers, and direct contact with voluntary and community organisations.

David Allen (Communications, Engagement & Marketing Manager) attended the meeting to answer any Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Why was the offer of printed flyer distribution via political parties discounted? Officer response – There was an issue with getting full delivery coverage of the Borough via these means. WBC were very grateful for all volunteers who helped out with delivery of the printed flyers. If possible, Royal Mail would be used in future as they were more consistent and had coverage of the entire Borough.
- What was the feedback from the communications placed in the local papers? Officer response – Local papers allowed for particular demographics to be targeted, who may otherwise be missed using other means such as social media and online

communications. All communications placed within local papers were also published online, to allow as many people as possible to receive the same information.

- Were there any potential changes to future communications based on lessons learned from the first wave of C-19? Officer response – In future, officers would endeavour to target particular groups of people. This could be achieved by working with specific organisations such as universities.
- It was noted that the Leader and Deputy Leader held regular briefings with opposition Group Leaders throughout the first wave. This was very useful and much appreciated, and was a different experience that seen in some other Local Authorities.
- It was noted that going forwards, WBC needed to be able to target younger demographics, perhaps by engaging with 6th forms and inform students why restrictions were being put in place and how people should be acting. Should a second wave fully take hold, it was noted that further efforts should be made to locally reach out to the elderly, BAME groups and vulnerable groups. Officer response – Throughout the national lockdown, improvements were made to the way WBC communicated with BAME and vulnerable groups of people. WBC had direct contacts within the BAME communities, and more written communications would be put in place moving forwards. Officers would look to improve communications with the elderly, and hope that the community would continue to look out for each other via a fostered community spirit.
- It was noted that WBC now had a list of approximately 4,500 clinically vulnerable individuals whom could be contacted when required.
- How many individuals from the BAME communities were within the 4,500 clinically vulnerable individuals? Officer response – Officers did not have ethnicity data on hand, however this would be looked into.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) David Allen be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The report, questions, and responses be used within the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's overall report on WBC's initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

35. COVID-19 RESPONSE - COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 33 to 40, which outlined Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) initial response with regards to the community safety response to the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

The report outlined a range of issues, including domestic abuse, parks and open spaces, play areas, fly tipping, and bonfires in addition to a range of other issues and topics.

The report concluded that the national lockdown had presented a range of new and unexpected challenges, in addition to exacerbated issues traditionally seen within holiday periods. WBC would therefore continue to work with its partners on a range of challenges in order to deliver key services to residents.

There had been some frustrations regarding the understanding of what powers a Local Authority had to deal with some of the issues outlined within the report, and there needed to be expectation management with regards to these issues as many of them had to be dealt with by the police service.

Michael Firmager (Deputy Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) and Nicholas Austin (Interim Assistant Director – Customer and Localities) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- How effective were dispersal orders? Officer response – A number of these orders had been made during lockdown. The main goal was to engage with repeat underage offenders in order that positive changes could be made.
- There had been a large increase in the amount of bonfires throughout lockdown, which had generated a number of complaints. Were there any additional powers available to WBC to help enforce this? Officer response – Should black smoke be present at a bonfire, then an environmental notice could be served should the appropriate officer attend the scene. A communications release did ask residents to be considerate with their usage of bonfires throughout lockdown, however in the absence of black smoke or continual bonfires then only advisory communications could be made, and there was not a blanket solution. With regards to commercial bonfires, these could often release toxic fumes into the environment. WBC were in the process of being very strict with commercial sites using bonfires to get rid of their waste, and fines of up to £5,000 could be issued on the second offence.
- What could be done to assist with the increasing numbers of domestic abuse victims? Officer response – A home refuge service was available which allowed for individuals to get away from their abusers, and WBC worked closely with Berkshire Women's Aid to reach out to victims. The key was about getting individuals to feel confident about referring themselves and getting the appropriate support.
- Were antisocial behaviour problems being dealt with effectively? Officer response – There were a number of particular 'trouble' areas within the Borough, which therefore had more support to deal with any issues. Antisocial behaviour was an acute problem which was difficult to deal with due to the sporadic nature of the incidents.
- It was noted that the management of play areas was handled very well throughout the closure and reopening phases, and thanks went out to the police and WBC officers for their support.
- Was the illegal encampment that settled within the Borough during lockdown dealt with? Officer response – Yes, the encampment was moved on and clean-up costs were issued to those responsible.
- It was noted that a good effort had been made to reduce incidences of fly tipping within the Borough. Officer comment – Members and residents should report phone numbers seen on flyers for suspicious waste removal services to help fill in the information gap.
- It was noted that the 'Prevent' training leaflet associated with the 'Channel Panel' would be circulated outside of the meeting.

- It was requested that WBC had both a Member and officer presence on the Wokingham Independent Advisory Group forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Michael Firmager and Nicholas Austin be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) The 'Prevent' training leaflet associated with the 'Channel Panel' be circulated outside of the meeting;
- 3) Officers investigate options so that WBC had both a Member and officer presence on the Wokingham Independent Advisory Group forum;
- 4) The report, questions, and responses be used within the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's overall report on WBC's initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

36. COVID 19 - COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 41 to 66, which outlined Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) initial response with regards to the community response to the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic.

The report outlined that the ambition was to support vital community services and deliver public health advice for a consistent response. Communications were critical in enabling an effective response throughout the lockdown, whilst supporting the Borough's vulnerable residents. WBC proactively phone called the most vulnerable residents within the Borough as a welfare check, to make sure they had access to vital services and resources.

WBC ran the community hub to provide access to food for residents that were in need. Personal protective equipment (PPE) was also provided to the voluntary sector as and when required. A mobility programme was undertaken in order to allow shielded residents to regain any lost mobility as a result of lockdown shielding. All aspects of the community response were regularly reviewed and adjusted.

Regarding the Wokingham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), it was stated that a large part of the response was down to assistance from WBC officers, and the CAB was very thankful to Martin Sloan and a range of other WBC officers for their support. The 'one front door' system helped over 3200 clients' access a range of services and support. The CAB had received a 180% increase in employment related inquiries throughout the lockdown period. Calls were received for help with food and prescriptions, and other needs such as housing were identified during these calls. Feedback on the support offered via the CAB was received and monitored throughout lockdown.

Martin Sloan (Head of Service – Community Care Services) and Jake Morrison (Chief Executive – Wokingham CAB) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- It was noted that the overall community response had been fantastic, and a job well done. The 'one front door' system worked very well as it allowed residents needs to be

picked up in a central place. Members were keen to make sure that the CAB was properly funded to allow for the same level of service to be delivered going forwards.

- How long would it take to set up the food hub again if required? Officer response – The plan was that the food hub would not be required to be set up again, as there were now better avenues to distribute food to those in need. If a food hub was required, the Borough leisure centres would need to be closed and volunteers would need to be sought. If necessary, the hub could be opened within days, however it was likely that other avenues would provide better options.
- Would WBC be reimbursed for PPE given out to voluntary organisations? Officer response – The Government has told Local Authorities to provide PPE to suitable organisations for the time being, and hopefully grant funding would be forthcoming.
- It was noted that the national food parcel scheme was not particularly effective, and this would be better delivered on a local level. WBC was prepared to deliver this within the Borough if required.
- Was the voluntary sector mental health contact funded by WBC? Officer response – Mental health issues were identified and signposted and approved via the integration board through the ring-fenced better care fund. This filled the gap in the service that WBC offered, and allowed for other parts of the voluntary sector to receive the appropriate training.
- It was noted by Jake Morrison that the CAB wanted to see if the ‘one front door’ system could offer additional help, by tracing whether wellbeing of service users was better after 3 to 4 weeks from the first point of contact. This would allow the CAB to view the bigger picture and thereby achieve better outcomes for clients. There were studies which showed plenty of links between other issues and mental health, and this was therefore a priority.
- It was noted that WBC had been ahead of the curve in several areas, including requiring those entering care homes from hospital to have had a negative C-19 test, and providing PPE to those organisations in need before the Government made this a policy. In addition, WBC managed to find housing for all those homeless individuals who wished to have housing provided. WBC would continue to bid for additional funding to cover services where available.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Martin Sloan and Jake Morrison be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The report, questions, and responses be used within the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee’s overall report on WBC’s initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

37. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS RELATED TO THE COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF THE INITIAL COVID-19 RESPONSE

The Committee discussed the range of items they had considered related to the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic. After deliberation, it was agreed that officers and the Chairman use the agenda reports, questions and minutes to feed into the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee’s overall report on WBC’s initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED That that officers and the Chairman use the agenda reports, questions and minutes to feed into the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee's overall report on WBC's initial response to the C-19 pandemic.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Bill Soane (Chairman), Dianne King (Vice-Chairman), Rachel Burgess, Maria Gee, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Also Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young
Catherine Hickman, Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigations
Amanda Lawes, Audit and Investigation Specialist
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Bob Watson, Head of Finance
Keeley Clements, Director Communities, Insight and Change
Sally Watkins, Assistant Director Digital and Change

14. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Helen Thompson, Ernst & Young.

15. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at a future date.

16. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

17. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

18. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

19. UPDATE ON THE PROGRESS OF THE YEAR-END AUDIT

The Head of Finance and Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young, provided an update on the progress of the year-end audit.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Head of Finance stated that the draft statement of accounts had been published in August in accordance with guidelines. Ernst & Young had done some preliminary work prior to the publication of the draft accounts and would also carry out further work in the near future. The final accounts would be produced by the end of November.
- Justine Thorpe indicated that the Finance Team had a finite capacity and had been dealing with the Covid payments, hence Ernst & Young had a second phase of the audit starting 28 September. The draft audit results report would be taken to the Committee's November meeting.
- Councillor Gee stated that the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors had changed its advice about giving qualified or unqualified opinions on property values during the Covid period. She questioned whether any of the properties that the Council

had had valued, had had a qualified or unqualified report on those assets, provided. The Head of Finance stated that the accounts were published as at the 31 March, pre dating the impact of Covid on valuations. However, an interim review would be carried out to make sure that nothing had changed as post balance sheet events. He would speak to the valuations team to establish on what basis the assets had been evaluated.

- The Head of Finance indicated that he would write a going concern note to the auditors.
- Justine Thorpe emphasised that Covid had thrown the PPE valuation into uncertainty as it had also done with pension asset evaluations.
- There would be more focus this year on levels of going concern but a risk based approach would be taken.
- Justine Thorpe confirmed that investment properties as well as PPE would be looked at.
- Councillor Ross questioned whether any issues were anticipated with the pension's element of the audit. The Head of Finance stated that he had spoken to the Director of Resources from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council who had been assured by Deloitte, that it would be completed on time. He added that it had been fed back that Ernst & Young would need to undertake their Audit work prior to the November Audit Committee and that it was hoped that the pensions work would be completed by the end of October. Justine Thorpe indicated that the previous year had been the first year that Deloitte had undertaken public sector audits for some time.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

20. CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered the Corporate Risk Register.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Discussions had commenced on the identification and mapping of interdependencies between risks in order to better understand and mitigate the impact of a number of risks materialising simultaneously. The output from these discussions would be shown in the next iteration of the Corporate Risk Register.
- One new risk had been added covering housing numbers in the Borough (risk no.19). This has been added in response to the Government consultation paper on Planning for the Future,
- The Brexit risk (no.10) had an increased risk profile resulting in further mitigating actions being planned. Members were reminded that the Brexit Officers Group had been re-established.
- The Climate Emergency risk (no. 13) in terms of impact and likelihood had been re-assessed as "Very High." Overview and Scrutiny had been reviewing Climate Emergency and a report on their findings would be considered by the Executive in the future. Mitigations for the risk might change following this.
- The Pandemic risk (no. 18) in terms of impact and likelihood has been re-assessed as "High." The Covid situation was fast moving and changing.
- The Director Communities, Insight and Change indicated that her directorate had been formed in March and that she had joined the Council in May.
- The Director Communities, Insight and Change indicated that she was responsible for;
 - digital and change;

- customer and localities
 - communications, engagement and marketing;
 - Human Resources
 - Strategy and planning
- Covid had changed the Council's work pattern and had led to a change in behaviours. Having the majority of the workforce working from home had put great pressure on the IT system and a robust IT infrastructure had been vital.
 - The Assistant Director Digital and Change indicated that the Council's telephony structure had been built and sized for a primarily office based workforce. Whilst IT had planned to move to a more cloud based solution, this had been planned for 2023/24. However, IT had been able to look at the way in which the telephony system was set up to ensure that there were no breaks in service either for external or internal customers. All critical services were currently forwarded out through the infrastructure. Contact centre staff could continue to work from home during the pandemic. Adults and Children's Services calls had been moved into Netcall, the Council's contact centre solution.
 - The amount of staff working from home had grown from approximately 300 to approximately 1100 during the pandemic. The Council's internet capacity had been increased from 300MB to 700MB. Mitigating actions had been put into place very quickly.
 - Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked about the single point of failure firewall. The Assistant Director Digital and Change commented that there were sufficient steps in place to ensure that the Council could still continue to work successfully. Over the next year, the Council would look to move its firewall into Microsoft Azure Cloud. At present, there were no corporate level concerns. The Assistant Director Digital and Change offered to provide an update at the Committee's next meeting. She emphasised that 75% of the Council's services were cloud based but there were some that could not be supplier hosted or be run through Microsoft Azure Cloud.
 - Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned why the Climate Emergency risk was 'very high'. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that it was one of the Council's key priorities. Councillor Burgess added that the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group had reviewed and commented on the Climate Emergency Action Plan.
 - Councillor Sargeant asked about measures being taken to mitigate against the workforce risk in light of Covid. The Director Communities, Insight and Change stated that where staff were working from home there was now virtual teams. Many podcasts on running a virtual team and also wellbeing had been produced. Update emails and newsletters were sent to staff and the Chief Executive had introduced the Big Chat, a weekly opportunity to update staff and for them to ask questions.
 - In response to a question from Councillor Ross, regarding her areas of responsibilities, the Director Communities, Insight and Change clarified that the Strategy and Planning team dealt with matters such as the KPI reporting and helping to produce the Council Plan.
 - Councillor Ross noted that with regards to Risk 19, the Corporate Risk Register stated that as it was a new and emerging risk with a short-term timescale, a verbal update would be provided at the Audit Committee meeting. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that he had nothing further to add to the statement made by the Leader of the Council at the Council meeting on 17 September.
 - Councillor Gee expressed surprise that the Government's proposals around land supply had not been included as a separate risk. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that Risk 19 was intended to cover everything within the Government consultation.

- Councillor Gee referred to the risk around SEND reform and questioned how much of the relevant workforce was permanent and how much was temporary, what the level vacancies was, and how this impacted on staff morale. The Assistant Director Governance agreed to seek clarification from the Director Children's Services, who he suggested the Committee invite to the next meeting to present the Corporate Risk Register.
- Councillor Gee stated that not all residents, particularly some more elderly residents, were online. She asked how these residents were supported. The Assistant Director Governance emphasised that the Council had been looking for some time at ensuring that its services were inclusive. Overview and Scrutiny were currently reviewing the Council's response to the Covid pandemic and this included how it had responded to its elderly and vulnerable residents. The Assistant Director Digital and Change added that key services had still been available via telephone during the pandemic.
- With regards to the Safeguarding Children and Young People risk, Councillor Burgess noted that the reporting of domestic abuse had increased as had mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges, and asked how this was being managed and mitigated against. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that he would seek a response from the Director Children's Services.
- In response to a question from Councillor Burgess regarding the data protection risk, the Assistant Director Governance clarified that a data protection audit had recently been carried out and was in its final stages. It would receive a level 2 assurance.
- Councillor Burgess felt that the leaflet drop listed as a mitigating action for Risk 19 was a political decision rather than a genuine mitigating action.
- With regards to the risk around equality duty, Councillor Burgess suggested that an assessment be carried out about how different groups had been impacted by Covid. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that part of Overview and Scrutiny's review of the Council's response to the pandemic, would include this element. It was agreed that the wording of the risk could be crisper.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey felt that more could be done around equalities.
- Justine Thorpe suggested that the Audit Committee should not be reviewing individual risks within the Corporate Risk Register and should be seeking overall assurance on the process of risk management to ensure that everything was working well.
- With regards to GDPR, Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked how the Council managed organisations that handled data for it. She was informed that information sharing agreements were in place and that any data breaches would be reported.

RESOLVED: That the risks and mitigating actions of the Council's corporate risks, be considered and noted.

21. RISK MANAGEMENT AUDIT 2020-21

The Audit and Investigation Specialist presented a report on the Risk Management Audit 2020-21.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- An audit of the Council's risk management had been carried out during spring and summer.
- The second highest level of assurance had been given.
- There had been a lot of engagement throughout the audit.

- Three concerns had been identified and action had already been taken with regards to some of them.
- The Corporate Risk Register and the Directorate risk registers had been updated during the process.
- A Risk Management Officer Group was being created and would have representatives from across the Council.
- Councillor Burgess asked the Audit and Investigation Specialist for her views as to whether the Audit Committee should consider the Corporate Risk Register or not, who responded that an overview of the process was helpful. As part of the audit, all of the individual risks had been discussed with officers.
- Councillor Gee asked for an explanation of what was meant by risk appetite and how it would be cascaded throughout the Council. The Audit and Investigation Specialist stated that because the Corporate Risk Register and Departmental Risk Registers were being updated at the time a detailed conversation was not had on Risk Appetite. Different Councils could have different ideas of Risk Appetite. There was a need to balance against the risk the Council or department was willing to accept, and to decide where the risk appetite sat. The tolerance for some risks was higher than others.
- Training would be undertaken on Risk Management.
- Justine Thorpe commented that the implementation of risk management needed to come from both the top and the bottom of the organisation.
- With regards to good practice, Councillor Ross questioned how the Council compared with comparable authorities and was informed by the Audit and Investigation Specialist that the Council performed well.
- Councillor Shepherd-Dubey questioned why N/A had been written against whether an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) had been carried out. The Assistant Director Governance commented that it was not directly relevant as the report purely reflected the results of the audit.

RESOLVED: That the findings of a recent Internal Audit review of Risk Management be noted.

22. 2020/21 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION PLAN IN YEAR REVIEW

The Committee received the 2020/2021 Annual Audit and Investigation Plan in Year Review.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigations indicated that the plan had originally been agreed by the Committee in February, immediately prior to Covid.
- Some audits scheduled earlier in the year had not been undertaken due to Covid. The team had been assisting the Finance team in ensuring Covid business payments had been correctly paid out.
- The activity for the remainder of the year had been refocused and the planning for 2021/22 year would begin soon.
- Councillor Gee expressed disappointment that an audit of the asset register that she had requested had not been included.
- Councillor Gee noted that the Brexit audit was no longer taking place but the risk around Brexit had been increased on the Corporate Risk Register. She questioned why this was. The Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigations indicated that the team had reprioritised its work. Audit officers would no longer attend the Brexit

officer group meetings but would still be available should advice be required. They would continue to stay abreast of developments.

- Councillor Gee expressed surprise that the number of days for an audit of the Adult Social Care provider market had decreased from 20 to 0. She felt that some key issues were no longer being audited. The Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigations commented that the team was working within limited resources. The audit days for some key risks on the Corporate Risk Register, such as financial systems, had increased.
- The Head of Finance indicated that payments and systems and Covid 19 response elements referred to within the Plan, were required by Government.
- Councillor Burgess stated that the reduction of audit days in some areas was concerning but that she understood the reasons provided. She questioned whether it would have an impact on Internal Audit's ability to provide a year end opinion. The Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigations stated that she had liaised with the Head of Internal Audit on the matter who had felt that the Plan was correctly balanced. Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young, indicated that external audit also considered the Head of Internal Audit's opinion.
- The Assistant Director Governance reminded Members that the 2021/22 Plan would be presented at the Committee's February meeting and would focus on key corporate risks.

RESOLVED: That the updated 2020/21 Audit and Investigation Plan be noted.

23. EFFECTIVENESS OF AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Committee discussed the effectiveness of the Audit Committee.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Assistant Director Governance referred to the CIPFA Audit Committees Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police contained within the agenda. He indicated that he would produce a brief survey on the effectiveness of the Audit Committee. It was suggested that this be sent to Audit Committee members, all other Members, Ernst & Young, and also the Directors to give a fuller picture.
- The survey would help to identify individual and collective training needs.
- The Audit Committee's terms of reference would be circulated to Members to remind them of the Committee's functions and to establish whether the terms of reference required further review.
- The results of the survey and an explanatory report would be taken to the Committee's November meeting.
- Councillor Gee questioned whether one version of the survey would be produced for Audit Committee members, and another for other Members who may be less aware of the role of the Committee.
- A number of Members supported circulating the survey to all Members.
- Councillor King questioned whether the Audit Committee would see the survey prior to it being circulated to other Members.
- Councillor Burgess identified value for money and fraud as areas where the Committee could receive further training.
- Councillor Burgess referred to the independence of the Committee. She questioned whether the Committee should have an independent member and if the Chairman of the Committee should be a member of the Opposition.

- Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young commented that she was encouraged by the Committee's enthusiasm.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) a survey on the effectiveness of the Audit Committee be produced and circulated to all Members, Ernst & Young and Directors.
- 2) that the results of the survey be presented at the November Audit Committee.

24. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The Committee agreed to invite Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services to the November committee meeting for the Corporate Risk Register item.
- The results of the effectiveness of the Audit Committee survey would be brought to the November meeting.
- The Head of Finance asked that the Statement of Accounts be prioritised at the November meeting.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked that an audit be carried out on equalities in the future.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

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**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 8.10 PM TO 8.36 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Prue Bray
Gary Cowan
Richard Dolinski
Lindsay Ferris
Sarah Kerr
Andrew Mickleburgh
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

28. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stuart Munro.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

30. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

30.1 Wesley Budd asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

I thank the Executive for discussing tonight the possibility of purchasing a limited number of Covid-19 tests. I believe that one figure that has been mooted is that each test could cost around £100. If the kits are purchased, as I hope they will be, will WBC pursue all avenues possible to try to recover all of these costs from the Government?

Answer

An important point to make here is that the price includes the whole testing service and not just the test kit. So that means the tech, the kit, the courier to the lab, the lab processing and public health having access to the test results. It is very important that for any potential test the data is fed into the NHS Track and Trace system.

We are only looking here to secure a backup supply should we have a significant situation, such as an outbreak, where there is a problem basically with the government testing routes. To answer your question directly though we will pursue all avenues for Government funding as we are doing for all the costs incurred directly or indirectly around Covid. Unfortunately, as you may know, the extra funding from central Government is currently not enough to cover all these costs and it is imperative that we target our resources to where they are most needed, which is we believe to be the case with this critical testing initiative. I would say on top of that myself, the Leader, and the Deputy

Leader are continuing to lobby our MPs and put as much pressure on them to address this situation and resolve basically some of these funding issues.

30.2 Al Neal asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

I welcome the proposals under discussion tonight regarding the purchase of Covid-19 test kits. To be effective in stopping the spread of the virus, selecting those to be tested, carrying out the tests and communicating the results are time critical tasks.

Is WBC confident that it has, or can create rapidly, the capacity to perform these tasks effectively?

Answer

As I stated in my first reply we are only investigating the option of purchasing a small amount of our own kits should we have an emergency situation, such as an outbreak, in Wokingham and the national system cannot support us adequately. So it is a back up to mitigate the risks that we have all seen in the media. We do not know how long the national system will take to recover enough capacity so this seems to me like a sensible step. At the moment cases of Covid in Wokingham are relatively low so between the national system and the local system and this back up provision we are trying to do all we can basically to make sure that we are prepared and we are ready for whatever may come and we are doing what we can to protect our residents.

In terms of speed, provision we are looking at securing if we have to use it, is a 48 hour response. It can get to 24 hours in urgent situations so we are confident that it will be timely and critical, and as I said before, all the data, one of the key things for us, is any data via this that is collected is fed into the NHS system basically, so that any evidence that was accrued can be used generally in the fight against Covid.

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

-

Question

This report accompanying the agenda refers to residents of Wokingham, yet many of our key workers are not Wokingham residents. Will these tests be available for both residents and non-residents who are key-workers in our Borough?

Answer

The national testing system run by the Government is available to all who need it. This includes anyone who develops symptoms of Covid 19 and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents. In addition, essential workers can apply for priority testing through the Government website and a small amount of testing kits have been supplied to each local school. We are not aiming to replace this system. As anyone who reads the paper or listens to the TV knows, this system is having well publicised capacity problems. What we are doing is purchasing additional spare capacity to deploy in an emergency situation, such as an outbreak, as directed by our Public Health Consultant, for hopefully what would be a short period of time until the national system recovers. It would be wrong of me to rule specific groups in or out of this, as we do not know what those situations will be. This situation is so fluid and fast moving. I would love to be able to tell you where we will be in two weeks' time but we

cannot. So therefore these tests will be managed in situations in Wokingham if we cannot secure enough capacity via the national route first. If there were residents outside of Wokingham that could not get tested and it was critical that they did for the management and health for the people of Wokingham then yes, we would consider it.

What I would say at the moment is that the rate of Covid in Wokingham, the rate per thousand, is around a third of the UK national average. Now the central Government provision, whilst it is limited, is obviously being directed to areas of higher risk, so at the moment basically, if there was an outbreak in an area of higher risk, it is more likely that the Government system is going to be stronger there than it currently is in Wokingham; which is currently a very low risk area. We obviously hope it stays that way.

Supplementary Question:

It is much appreciated that WBC are trying to chart a path through the chaos created by the confusing messages and ineffective action from central Government. I understand that the initial tranche is going to be 500 tests. This does not seem to me to be a very high number. For example, I am a volunteer at the RBH and I live in Wokingham. Would I be eligible for one of these tests should I need one? Or a refuse collector? Looking wider, what roles are you defining as key workers?

Supplementary Answer:

The figure of 500 and the figure of 1,000 from the original commitment was done following quite a bit of study into what we thought consumption would be or could be. But, as I have already said basically, it is very difficult to anticipate the situation, which is fluid and ever changing. We will continue to review going forward where we are and what is going on. All the potential tests, should Executive approve, that we are looking to move forward with, have got a 12 month shelf life so there is plenty of time to get through them, and we hope obviously that we will get near to that level.

In terms of your specific question as to who would be eligible and who would not, what I would say to that at the moment is that is impossible for me to give a strict definition on that right now because the situation is every changing. The judgement would be made basically on:

- a) Can the national system cope? Obviously, if it can cope and an appropriate response is being provided, then none of this applies.
- b) If it cannot cope, what would any steps that we take for that situation to lower the risk of an outbreak spreading, and control it basically in Wokingham.

Obviously, that is going to depend on the scenario at the time. Now we can all make educated guesses about how we think this is going to play out over the next few months and where the greatest elements of risk are, but no disrespect intended they are educated guesses. We have set up a system in the Council where each situation would be judged by the Public Health Consultant, the Director of Adult Services, senior leadership for the Council, with me and the Leader obviously having oversight of it. So I cannot give you specific criteria today but I hope you understand the reasons why.

31. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

31.1 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

What criteria/protocol is going to be used to decide who receives a WBC funded test, particularly if there are a number of people/areas who may need such a test?

Answer

The purchase of tests for WBC is being proposed within the context of significant capacity problems within the national Test and Trace system. WBC tests will be reserved for emergency situations, for example, where there is a significant outbreak and the national testing cannot be rapidly deployed or where a lack of national testing poses a risk to the capacity of local authority services; which we all know are vital to deal with some of the aged and vulnerable in the community, etc. People who really need our support.

The decision about when to use WBC testing will be made by WBC Public Health Lead Ingrid Slade and Director of Adult Social Care Matt Pope, in consultation with WBC senior management team and the Lead Member for Wellbeing and Adult Services, which is obviously me, and obviously the Leader. I think in terms of criteria, for the reasons I have just said to Mike Smith it is hard for me to give you anything. I can make an educated guess of where we will be in two weeks, four weeks, but I have no way of knowing that. All the evidence from part 1 of Covid taught us, basically, that what we expected to happen did not happen, and a lot of things we did not expect, did happen. I think the key here is just to keep watching, talking, meeting regularly and planning as we go. I am more than happy to keep you, your Group and the Independents informed of any significant changes going forwards.

Supplementary Question

When will these be available?

Supplementary Answer

We should Executive approve tonight, what we did at the end of last week is to reserve some capacity because we had to, to secure an early date. Obviously if we had left it a week, I think two days after we had enquired, strangely enough the NHS were on the phone to this company, so I will leave that to you as to what you may think of that. We were very anxious that we did not wait a week or two and end up going back a month on delivery date.

The answer to your question is, we are hopeful that if Executive approve tonight, they will be available from very early October.

31.2 Andy Croy had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question but in his absence the following answer was provided I:

Question

The initial lockdown saw large numbers of people finally recognised as keyworkers.

While NHS and caring staff were clearly always in this category, the lockdown made us realise that shop workers, refuse collection, postal workers and many others were also key workers. The paper is not clear on exactly which key workers (and which schools - maintained schools, fee paying private schools?) will be eligible for testing.

Can the Executive Member outline the range of 'other key workers' and schools for who it is anticipated testing will be made available?

Answer

The Government national testing system scheme is available to all who need it. This includes anyone who develops symptoms of Covid-19 and also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS and social care staff and care home residents. In addition, essential workers can apply for priority testing through the Government website. As part of this all schools have a small supply of kits already. We are not replacing this system but we know that that system is having well publicised problems. What we are hoping to purchase is additional spare capacity to deploy in emergency situations, such as an outbreak, as directed by our Public Health Consultant for a hopefully short period of time until the national system recovers. It would be wrong to rule specific groups in or out of that at this stage, as we just cannot anticipate what those potential situations will be.

32. COVID-19 TESTING

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to purchase a Covid-19 swab test service for emergency provision.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services outlined the proposal which was to purchase an amount of Covid testing kits to provide the ability to test educational key workers, where there was a risk to schools capacity, and other key workers should they be unable to access testing through the NHS track and trace system. Based on initial data provided by schools, and considering the possible size of local outbreaks, it was estimated that around 500 tests, with the capacity to increase to 1,000 tests at a future point if necessary, were required.

Councillor Margetts advised that the selected supplier would be able to deliver the required number of test kits, which had a shelf life of 12 months, at a lead time of a week. The tests once completed would be sent to the lab and would be turned around within 48 hours, seven days a week. All positive results would be notified to Public Health England; thereby linking into the track and trace system.

Councillor Kaiser commented that he believed that spending money on Covid tests was completely justified as the proposal would support those in care homes and in schools.

Councillor Haitham Taylor also provided her support to the scheme and particularly how important it was to access tests over the weekend. She cited a recent case of a small primary school who was unable to access enough tests or advice over a weekend which led to the school having to close because one teacher had tested positive for Covid-19. This had a huge impact on the local community and she would not want to see that happen within the Borough. By purchasing these tests it would mean that testing could be undertaken quickly and should be able to alleviate this happening.

Councillor Margetts provided an update on the situation in the Borough and stated that Wokingham currently had a low level of Covid with cases around a third of the national average with track and trace just under 90% which was encouraging. However account had to be taken of the fact that the national picture was getting worse and that further outbreaks were likely to occur. The Council was therefore planning for these eventualities to ensure that they were ready to deal with and mitigate such incidences as soon as

possible. It was noted that the Council would be shortly accepting responsibility for some track and trace functions.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the gaps in Covid testing provision in Wokingham Borough be noted;
- 2) a supplementary estimate of up to £120,000 be approved for the purchase of Covid swab test service for emergency provision;
- 3) this supplementary estimate will be drawn down in stages as tests are needed for essential workers or outbreak management;
- 4) the decisions relating to the draw down on this supplementary estimate be delegated to the Director for Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Lead Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services on the advice of the Public Health Consultant.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.09 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Prue Bray
Gary Cowan
Andy Croy
Richard Dolinski
Lindsay Ferris
Sarah Kerr
Andrew Mickleburgh
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

19. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stuart Munro.

20. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 30 July 2020 and the Extraordinary Executive held on 11 September 2020 were confirmed as correct records and will be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

21. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

22.1 Jennifer Lissaman asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

I am asking this question on behalf of the Wokingham Waterside Centre (WWC) Board of which I am a member.

Since April this year there has been tremendous use of the beautiful open space between WWC and Thames Valley Park Nature Reserve, the majority of people spending the whole day there and sometimes overnight as well. Soon, the Park and Ride, to the rear of WWC will be open.

As agreed with this Council earlier this year WWC has one toilet on the outside of the building for use only with a RADAR key. The outcome of this is, unfortunately, that people are using land adjacent to the campsite at WWC, and possibly the Nature Reserve, to relieve themselves. WWC trustees/board members find this unacceptable and ask that

you find a way to provide properly working public toilets in a location appropriate to this sensitive location by the River Thames National Path.

Answer

I must admit I have used that location myself during very sunny days and it is very pleasant out there.

Going back to 2009, in line with many other authorities throughout the country, the Council took the decision to stop providing standalone public toilet facilities and instead established a Local Loo Scheme where local businesses and other facilities (such as Council offices) make their toilets available for public use. This decision was taken because these toilets were costly to maintain due to regular incidents of vandalism and graffiti. The toilets also attracted anti-social behaviour and were often closed to the public for repairs.

This approach has worked well for many years and has proved a more efficient way of ensuring access to toilets across the Borough.

Due to the size and semi-rural nature of our Borough, it is not practical for the Council to provide public toilet facilities in every location where residents may want to use them. We urge everyone who lives in and visits our Borough to adhere to the laws around public decency and to report any instances where this isn't happening to the police.

Supplementary Question

We were part of the Local Loo Scheme but that is the reason that there was a discussion with the Council earlier this year, and one of the toilets was closed because it could not cope with the usage and was broken. That is why there is only one toilet for use with a RADAR key. There were local loos available there. The Waterside Centre was paid to run them, but now there is only one for those with disabilities. You are not quite up-to-date with the latest usage of these things and I wondered if we could perhaps have some progress on this with a meeting with either yourself or the relevant Officer to discuss a way forwards, otherwise the situation can only get worse? It is not acceptable to have people using the Waterside Centre grounds as a public toilet.

Supplementary Answer

I totally agree Jenny. There is a need for everybody to be responsible for their own behaviour, especially at this this time when resources are spread so thin, for us as an authority, and the Police. Essentially the point is why should the Council spend more money responding to the behaviour of a few people who spoil the experience for the vast majority visiting the area near the Thames. I am very happy to meet you offline with the appropriate Officer to discuss this further.

22.2 Arya Babollah had asked the Leader of the Council the following question and in his absence the following answer was provided:

Question

Knowing what you have said about Black Lives Matter, what were you thinking when you tried to commandeer a Black Lives Matter banner for your photo ops at the BLM protest against for what you said and stand for in Elms Field in August?

Answer

Thank you very much for your question. I am really pleased as it allows me to articulate the Council's and therefore my approach to these issues.

As the Leader of the Council, I have a duty to all residents, to understand their views, and do everything in my power to ensure the Council upholds its equalities duties.

My previous comments about Black Lives Matter have been misconstrued, although I accept, they may have been open to an interpretation that I did not intend. I also wish to acknowledge that there is always space for all of us, including myself, to educate ourselves and grow in our understanding of each other.

Firstly, and most importantly, we are an organisation committed to antiracism, promoting equality and celebrating diversity. The staff and all the Members of the Council wish to be at the forefront of best practise. If there is an area, in which we are deficient in these aims, we wish to know it, to address it if we can and create a better quality of life for all our residents. I believe I speak for all Councillors.

I came to England as a boy speaking little English and suffered prejudice and abuse because of my origins and speech. In the fifties, those prejudices were very real.

Black Lives Matter is an idea, a philosophy, a moral code and a movement. The idea, philosophy and moral code are central to what we believe we are and I am.

The Black Lives Matter rally in Elms Field was a public meeting held on Borough Council land managed by the Town Council. It was advertised as a peaceful and welcoming meeting. The organisers knew that the Deputy Chief Executive and I had accepted their invitation and would be there. Indeed, they had welcomed us and came to greet us. The first speaker acknowledged my presence by mischaracterising me as having associated the murders in Forbury Gardens with the BLM march that day in Reading. At the time, I explicitly, publicly and frequently said that there was no association between those two events and have repeated this regularly. Indeed, the Police have also expressed that assertion. I have apologised freely and openly to anyone who misconstrued what I have said and have thereby taken offence.

I did not commandeer the flag as you suggest, in fact, I was invited to join my Council colleagues who were holding the flag, when an individual in a mask snatched their flag from them and ran away. I was saddened to witness that as it lowered the tone of what was otherwise a peaceful and powerful event. And so, I fear that you have been misinformed about the incident.

Please join me in striving to make the quality of life in all our community better.

Our mission as a Borough Council and mine as an individual is committed to antiracism, promoting equality and celebrating diversity and improving where we can the quality of life of all our residents and helping residents in their pursuit of happiness.

Please Arya join us as part of the solution and many thanks again for raising this question.

22.3 Tracey Stone had asked the Leader of the Council the following question and in her absence the following answer was provided:

Question

You have made statements on national television and made postings on your Facebook page which could appear racist and has spread fear, alarm and distress to many people of all ethnicities, but particularly black residents, living in Wokingham and Districts. As the leader of a public body, why did you do this?

Answer

Again, I welcome the question.

It is really great to have the opportunity to restate the Council's and my position.

In my answer to the previous question, and at the Council meeting on 23 July, I have sought to clarify my position, but I am happy to re-iterate this as this is a very important issue for our community.

I completely support the message, principles and the aims of Black Lives Matter in the UK.

I have always been opposed to discrimination in all its forms. I understand the need to have a clear focus on tackling racism where it is found.

If any comments that I have made have been offensive to anybody then, once again, I apologise unreservedly. That was never my intention; rather by reaching out we had hoped to bring residents together.

Firstly, and most importantly, we are an organisation committed to antiracism, promoting equality and celebrating diversity. The staff and all the Members of the Council wish to be at the forefront of best practice. If there is an area in which we are deficient in these aims we wish to know it, to address it if we can and create a better quality of life for all our residents.

I have never made statements on national television. There was a piece which was selectively extracted from an Executive meeting mixed in a feature on South Today. My postings on Facebook were not racist and indeed I have gone to great lengths to clarify any possibility of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. I have also apologised if I have inadvertently caused offence amongst any community; I would never knowingly do so.

Unfortunately, your question is phrased in a way which is incorrect and mischaracterises my words and actions.

The diverse nature of the British population is a beautiful thing and something we can and should be proud of. We can experience incredible cultures from the far reaches of the world with greater clarity and depth than any generation before us. We live together with people who have stories drastically different to ours. These are all aspects of diversity worth encouraging, enjoying and celebrating, because we are lucky to be able to do so.

Our mission as a Borough Council and mine as an individual is committed to antiracism, promoting equality and celebrating diversity and improving where we can the quality of life of all our residents and helping residents in their pursuit of happiness.

Please Tracey join us as part of the solution and many thanks for raising this question.

22.4 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

The paper you are presenting tonight seeks to help alleviate the effects of fuel poverty on some of the most vulnerable, at risk and lowest income households across our Borough. Please can you confirm how recipient households will be identified and what criteria will be used when deciding how to prioritise households?

Answer

As you mentioned, this scheme has been developed to help those in most need, and seeks to help alleviate fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency of households locally. Wokingham Council has 949 properties (HRA properties) in the E, F and G bands. These are the three least energy efficient bands. In addition, from the database we can identify those older private properties that could benefit from this scheme; together there is a combined figure of 1,809 properties. These homes form the target group, which we will review against the eligibility criteria for this scheme.

Our local knowledge and experience is essential in identifying those with the greatest need from across the Borough, and we will focus on these households first. These properties will receive a letter to invite those who meet the eligibility criteria to contact us. We will liaise with our housing departments to target those on benefits or council tax benefits who could also benefit from this. To be eligible, households must receive one or more of the benefits listed in the Home Heating Cost Reduction Obligation; also known as the "the Affordable Warmth Obligation".

The Council will use directly targeted letters to invite residents to respond and are currently using this system, which is tried and tested. Upon the response we will confirm eligibility criteria and arrange a visit and survey to establish costings and customers approval.

We want to achieve as widespread an uptake as possible to ensure that energy efficiency measures are installed in as many eligible households as possible. The Energy Company Obligations Grants are paid directly to the eco installers rather than the household or HRA company. This guarantees that residents will benefit from the efficiency upgrades without either themselves or the Council having to contribute financially. As a Council we have set aside £30,000 of pre-budgeted money to meet funding gaps should for any reason an identified household not be eligible for 100% grant of works.

Supplementary Question

Could you please confirm if this is the same or if it is a different scheme to the Government's Green Homes Grant Scheme?

Supplementary Answer

I am really pleased to say that this is actually very separate to the Government's Green Homes Grant Scheme, although many of the same houses would be eligible for both. I actively advise any resident in the Borough who is a homeowner to check out the www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk website to see whether they would or would not be eligible for a Green Homes grant, which is money paid by the Government in order to make environmental upgrades to your home. I have applied myself for grant money to put solar panels on the roof of my house, which will help fund my heating bill, and should help

bring it down by about 25% hopefully. I actively encourage any householder across the Borough to apply for this, completely separate scheme.

22.5 Judith Clark had submitted a question which was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

23. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

23.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

The Government has introduced new Regulations some of which came into force on 22 July. One in particular gives CIL charging authorities a discretion for a limited time to defer CIL payments, to dis-apply late payment interest and surcharge payments; and to credit interest already charged to developers.

What impact will this have on existing planning applications along with the Council's ability to deliver on infrastructure and climate emergency programmes?

Answer

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Community Infrastructure Levy (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 are now in force. These temporary regulations will remain in force until 31 July 2021. They are aimed at helping small and medium sized developers with an annual turnover of less than £45 million who are experiencing financial difficulties because of the effects of Covid-19. The regulations enable charging authorities to defer payments for up to 6 months, to temporarily dis-apply late payment interest and to provide discretion to return interest already charged where they consider it appropriate to do so.

The regulations can apply to any payment that fell due after 21 March 2020. The request should be made in writing no earlier than 14 days before the CIL payment is due. The Council can request further information which should be provided within 14 days of the request. The Council can grant or refuse the request. A deferral is for up to 6 months from the date the request was received. If the request is refused, the developer has 7 days from date of refusal to make the CIL payment. There is no right of appeal against a refusal.

We have published an FAQ and application form for those seeking deferred CIL payment on our website. I will send the link to you Gary. Any applications for deferrals will be required to demonstrate that their need for a deferral is as a direct result of Covid-19, including by submission of 2 years audited accounts and a written financial impact assessment.

To date we have not had received any applications for deferral of payment through this route. For the most part developers operating in Wokingham Borough are national house builders who do not qualify for deferral under this scheme so it is not anticipated it will have any impact on our major development proposals.

There is likely to be some deferred payments in relation to smaller developments, but it is important to note it is a deferral, not non-payment. Surcharges are discretionary in any case and we would be unlikely to apply them where a small business' financial difficulties were clearly related to Covid-19. The scheme waives late payment interest, which would be mandatory under normal circumstances, for a deferred period. On the whole it is not anticipated that this particular scheme will impede delivery of the Council's capital programme or climate emergency programme and is in line with the Council's other measures to help support small businesses to survive the pandemic.

Supplementary Question

Thanks very much for that. It really is helpful. It really should have said what impact has on ability, not what impact will. From your answer, it is fairly clear that to date it has no impact. I would be interested in being kept up-to-date should you end up in the situation where we do get into problems with the developers but thank you for the answer.

Supplementary Answer

I will send it over to you Gary.

23.2 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Individuals and families living in poverty are not identified as one of the nine protected characteristics under the Equalities Act of 2010. However, Council decisions and actions often impact on individuals and families – frequently offering vital practical support, but sometimes in ways that could potentially cause harms and unintended consequences. Is there a process, perhaps something similar to the our Borough Equalities Impact Assessments, that WBC can apply to ensure that impacts of WBC policy proposals and actions on the poorest in our community will be explicitly considered, documented and given a significant weighting in the policy making process?

Answer

Poverty is a terrible blight and it is vital that it remains in the forefront of our thinking, in particular as the impact of Covid-19 continues to be felt on all our economy, and so I am grateful to you for this question.

There is a fundamental difference between the protected characteristics you mention and poverty, which is that we will always aim to eradicate poverty. To prevent it and help people out of it. Whereas the nine characteristics are to be protected at the least and, in many ways, to be cherished and celebrated. This means the two things are in different categories and must be considered differently.

But, in other ways, your point is valid. In particular, we recognise the need to understand poverty better so as to guide our policies appropriately. We need to know of its causes so that we can: prevent it; its impacts so that we can mitigate them; and its escape routes so that we can support people through them.

That is why we are developing our bank of local insight and knowledge to understand the complexity of poverty in the Borough so that this understanding can drive more informed decision and policy making and reinforce our approach to this complex issue.

We are not starting from scratch with this; the Council's Community Engagement Team (previously the Community Development Workers) have for many years operated in our

more deprived areas, building up invaluable local contacts and understanding as well as supporting people and neighbourhoods to become stronger and more self-sufficient. And we have also always sought to prevent, mitigate and tackle poverty in practical ways. For example through the work of the Early Help Team with targeted families, by providing food bank vouchers and by back-to-work and employment advice and support.

So our work on poverty will be guided by this combination of on-the-ground knowledge, data analysis and existing good practice in order to better respond to what we know will be a growing issue due to the impact of Covid-19 already mentioned.

Supplementary Question

Unfortunately, as you stated the pandemic means that it is likely that poverty is going to rise further in our Borough. You have mentioned the Community Engagement Team and the Early Help Team but where within the WBC organisational chart does monitoring of poverty levels and the impacts of WBC's policies and action on poverty, currently sit? If possible, can you please provide the name of a specific Officer and/or role with primary responsibility for this activity?

Supplementary Answer

I think within the arrangements that we are now just about to put in place again for the second wave, I think that the Officer who would be responsible for poverty would be the Chief Executive and the Councillor would be myself.

We are very alive to the issue that as we go into the second wave, there will be parts of the community which will suffer more than others, and we have to be on that case all the time. So Andrew it is a very pertinent question and which we are considering all the time now that we are in the second wave.

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

Question

The ban on private landlords evicting tenants facing financial hardship because of the pandemic is likely to come to an end soon. Has WBC done any modelling of what the impact would be in terms of numbers of people the Borough would need to re-home in order to fulfil our statutory requirements to the homeless?

Answer

The ban on evictions was extended to 20 September from when the courts were able to start considering claims made by landlords and the process towards eviction could start.

Although the ban has come to an end landlords now have to give their tenants a minimum 6 month notice period to leave their properties after an eviction notice is issued. However if there are serious mitigating factors, such as anti-social behaviour, fraud or domestic abuse then the notice period would be only 4 weeks (or in the case of domestic abuse 2 weeks). I am sure you would agree that if a woman is living with a man, or the other way round, you would not want them living together for more than 2 weeks.

During the Covid pandemic the team, our team, you have obviously been in the meeting today with TLIP, have continued to work with landlords and tenants to try and support both parties to resolve any issues threatening those tenancies and will continue to assist those who are at threat of homelessness as our statutory duty asks.

From our work with landlords and tenants over the past few months we are not aware of any significant number of pending eviction cases however the Homeless Reduction Act specialist will continue to monitor the situation and carry out some more detailed modelling in October.

That intelligence and modelling will be reported through to our multi-agency and cross-directorate, and will no doubt turn up and be spoken about at our Tenants' meeting, the Local Homelessness Co-ordination Cell for consideration. That Group has overseen our successful approach to tackling rough sleepers and homelessness during the pandemic. Again, it was at the meeting today, I think when they did the last count. We had four people in the Borough who are homeless; which is probably what most Boroughs can only dream of.

Supplementary Question

It was pleasing to hear today that since we have been able to get Government funding in April we have managed to make some progress, particularly on rough sleepers. But, given where we are and the modelling that is being done to see how we can take this forward both short term and long term, I wondered what analysis is being done as part of that modelling, of the people who may be presenting as homeless as to whether there may be any groups that are particularly at risk of losing their homes or becoming rough sleepers? I am particularly, but not solely, thinking about this in the context of Black Lives Matter and whether we are actually looking at the ethnicity of people as well as disability, sexual orientation and so on, to check that there is not a problem anywhere in the system, or there is not something we could do better to help particular groups?

Supplementary Answer

My response to that Prue, is as you would expect, housing allocation is colour blind, and anyone who applies for a home is treated in the same way. If we were to find that there were an ethnic aspect to seeing disproportionate people from cultural backgrounds or ethnicity, we would actually have to start to record that. I think that is a very good idea and when I see Simon I will be asking if he can just make a point of making sure we are understanding this going forward.

23.4 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Can you advise what the reserves of the Council are at this time (i.e. week commencing 21st September 2020)?

Answer

Although we monitor the general balance at least monthly and adjust for supplementary estimates and known pressures, the Council does not keep a running balance of all reserves throughout the year, but as part of our monitoring we produce forecasts of the position at year end to assist with future budget setting. That I bring to the Council and the Executive when we talk about monitoring.

Balances on reserves as at 31st March 2020 I can tell you are on page 18 of our draft accounts, which are available on the Council's website. These show a General Fund reserve of £12.43 million, which is in the General reserve, and Earmarked Reserves of £91.52 million.

The forecast General Fund reserve balance at the end of this financial year (31 March 2021) as reported in Quarter 1 to Executive was £5.01 million. The main reasons for the drop was the approved carry forwards of £2.7 million and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A revised estimate at Quarter 2 will be reported to Executive in October which should see an improved position due to additional funding from Government for Covid-19 costs and a better understanding of the financial pressures. The 2020/21 annual budget includes a net contribution to the Earmarked Reserves of £1.5 million, so they are actually going up.

Supplementary Question

John said he said another answer; could I have the other answer please?

Supplementary Answer

The other answer is basically Lindsay that, it was only one paragraph where we were different, but basically where we are at the moment is that we feel that we are well placed compared with other councils. But I think that you have heard it many times before that when we were looked at, a report was issued by Maidenhead Borough which showed us having the tenth best reserves of any unitary in the country

23.5 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

There still appears to be a lack of clarity and commitment from the Government to long-term funding for Council Covid-related expenditures. Some of these vital activities that the Council has funded from its own resources are particularly important for less economically well-off members of our Borough. Does the Council share this concern and if so, what practical actions can be taken to address this issue and particularly to avoid cuts that could disproportionately harm the poorest, forced upon the Council by insufficient Government support?

Answer

In March of this year, the Government pledged to support local authorities through the Covid-19 pandemic. They have made available £4.3 billion to local authorities and Wokingham Borough Council has received support in the form of a direct grant of £8.3 million. In addition to this the Government have announced a variety of other measures, some offering financial support, such as the '75p in the £' compensation for loss of income, to passported grants to local businesses and care providers, and also deferring payments to assist with cashflow issues.

That said, the Council has had to front fund a significant amount of support to residents, suppliers, partners (such as Places for Leisure) and care providers, and this will impact on the Council's General Fund Balance, hence why we are forecasting £5.1million for the end of the year. The money it holds to cover such crises, which is the reserves obviously, where every effort is being made by the Council's Officers to secure funding to cover these pressures and manage down costs, it is still anticipated that the Council's general balances will be depleted at year end. Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 does not fall neatly into one year and as such its impact will be felt strongly as we formulate our budgets for 2021/22 and beyond.

I can assure the Councillors and the residents of the Borough that we will continue to make representations to Government for the funding we need in both this year and future years. In addition, we will need to continue with our diligent measures of financial management: to target expenditure where it is most needed (which are those that are suffering most financially); seek value for money in all we do; be efficient' be innovative; and work with our partners to create the most effective service delivery options.

Work is already underway on setting the Medium Term Financial Plan, which will be coming to Overview and Scrutiny in the not too distant future, for the next three years and Officers are working to maintain a financially sustainable Council with a balanced budget whilst minimising the impact on residents. Inevitably this, as with all Councils at this time, will mean having to make some difficult decisions, which will make the targeting of resources to those most in need an even greater imperative. As stated, a second wave of the virus will only make matters worse, and of course, what we have seen in the last couple of days, we are nowhere near out of the woods. I think it is very important that people understand that if we as a Council do not control our costs and maintain our costs, we will be broke, and if we are broke then we are no good to anybody.

Supplementary Question

By way of trying to replenish our reserves in due course, is it likely that Council related services are to see an increase in cost to people using those services, and if so are there any measures in place, or could be put in place, that would help those that are from poorer backgrounds?

Supplementary Answer

There are a number of ways that the Council raises money. One of them is via investments and another one is via fees and from council tax. Council tax is capped and so there is only so much we can raise with that. A number of the services we provide, we are only allowed to cover the cost of those services, especially if they are statutory, so we can only raise those in line probably with inflation or what we are experiencing. There are opportunities to raise some of our other fees where we offer pretty good value for money, but we understand during this time everybody is going to be in the same situation.

Wherever we possibly can we will make concessions as we are looking to do at this current moment. There is a consultation going out with the Council Tax Discount Scheme and that will be coming forward shortly to show you what we are doing with that.

23.6 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Why are there 100 unrelated houses added into a plan for the badly needed special needs school in Winnersh?

Answer

The Council has been working very closely with the Department for Education and our colleagues at Reading Borough Council to identify a suitable location for a much-needed new SEND school.

Having reviewed the Council's land holdings it is proposed to site the school on land at Winnersh Farm adjacent to Wheatfield Primary School. It is anticipated that a detailed planning application for the SEND school will be submitted in the next year. The

application will be for the SEND school only and will not include any housing proposals, and I am sure you will be on the Planning Committee when that one comes through.

However, as you are very aware, the consultation draft of the Local Plan Update, which was earlier in the year in February, proposes the allocation of land at Winnersh Farm for around 250 new homes across both Council and privately owned land in that area. The proposed number of new homes was adjusted downwards to account for the potential new SEND school, as I have just mentioned.

A separate application, outline application for housing on the remaining Council-owned land is likely to be submitted in the early part of next year, for consideration, which will obviously mean both of them going to the Planning Committee.

Supplementary Question

When is the Local Plan Update Committee going to be meeting next to consider all these problems that we have, including all the extra 100 houses?

Supplementary Answer

That is an absolute brilliant question because I was with Nigel and Ian last week and I have asked them to put a timetable out over the next week to get a plan, and get some dates in the diary to start that, so that we can go back to where we were, look at what has happened and look at the options. So, diary dates should be coming out, where are we now, potentially tomorrow or Monday. You will obviously be included in that, along with Lindsay and the rest of the working group.

23.7 Richard Dolinski asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

My question is to the Lead Member for Children's Services regarding the proposals for a new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school in Winnersh.

There is much clinical evidence published that shows that major highways have an adverse effect on the health and wellbeing of children who live near or attend schools adjacent to major highways, both from the failing air quality and from the noise pollution. I have no doubt that any new building design will mitigate against noise, but children are not just confined to just four walls. As a SEND teacher I became acutely aware of how sensitive some children can be and how debilitating this can be for them. Worryingly the Council is proposing to build a school next to one of the busiest and expanding motorways in the UK, which again research has shown has the greatest impact on the health of our residents because of the poor air quality. Anything about 100 on the boundaries between index points for each pollutant is harmful. Therefore, will the Council conduct extensive air monitoring exercises and publish its results before any planning approval is considered? I'm sure you will agree, safeguarding our children is paramount.

Answer

First of all, it is great news that we are able to work with the Department for Education and Reading Borough in bringing forward a much-needed and welcomed facility in Wokingham Borough.

We are very conscious of the potential air quality and noise issues surrounding the site and our technical teams have already carried out initial impact assessments on these matters and it demonstrated that the noise and air quality levels were acceptable.

These assessments have helped us identify the best location for the school to the western end of the site which is furthest from the motorway and adjacent to the existing Wheatfield Primary School.

All of these studies have been carried out in association with the Department for Education and they are also satisfied that the levels are acceptable.

Further, more detailed studies will be carried out by the Department for Education as part of the Planning Application process and will then be considered by the Local Planning Authority, which of course is us.

Supplementary Question

Obviously, I am pleased that some monitoring is already taking place. However, this is not the first time that a similar concern has been raised. The Executive Member for Environment on 23 February 2017 replied to a resident's questions regarding pollutants associated with the M4 motorway at Winnersh. The Executive Member quoted the Government's warning of the uncertainties, including increased traffic, and in order to monitor concentrations of pollution from the M4. In light of those uncertainties and the possibility of pollution levels exceeding the Air Quality Index of 100, that is the safe level, anything above that and children with special educational needs will suffer, and noise levels rising about 50Db, again children with special educational needs will suffer with anything above that. Can we really be confident that Warren Farm and the area that you have identified next to the other primary school is a safe location now and into the future as a site for children with learning disabilities and co-morbid conditions? Once built there is no turning back.

Supplementary Answer

As I have already explained, we have done assessments already. The Department for Education is involved and I am certain that they will ensure that this school will be put in a place where no child will be put in any danger in any shape or form.

23.8 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

What sort of Local Authority builds a SEND school next to one of the busiest motorways in the country?

Answer

The development of the SEND school in Winnersh is a welcome one, and will provide a valuable contribution to both the education for children with SEND within the Borough, but also in terms of the reduction of out of Borough placements that can be both disruptive to the family and cost the Council money.

We are very conscious of the potential air quality and noise issues surrounding the site and I can advise that our technical teams have already carried out initial impact assessments as UllaKarin has already mentioned. During the master-planning process, which demonstrate the noise and air levels are acceptable, these assessments have

helped us identify the best location for the school at the western end of the site which is furthest from the motorway and adjacent to the existing Wheatfield Primary school.

All of these studies have been carried out in association with the Department of Education who are similarly satisfied that the levels are acceptable.

Furthermore, detailed studies will be carried out by the Department for Education as part of the Planning Application process and considered by the local authority early next year.

Supplementary Question

This school is going to be there for a hundred years and whatever the studies say people are not going to understand why a school has been built there. You have spoken about the best location for the school, but that is the best location on the site. We should be looking at the best location in the Borough because I cannot think of any worse location then next to a motorway, can you?

Supplementary Answer

This was not the only site that was considered and it was obviously considered with the Department of Education and with our colleagues at Reading Borough Council. It was not just that we said this is the only site available so this is where it is going to go. In answer to your question it was not the only site considered.

24. SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICE

The Executive considered a report relating to the re-commissioning of the Council's substance misuse service in order to have a new contract in place by June 2021.

When introducing the report the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised that the current provider of the Council's drug and alcohol substance misuse service, which was a statutory requirement, had served notice and advised that they had been subsidising the service from their charitable reserves for some time but could no longer sustain this position. An agreement was reached to support the provider temporarily whilst a benchmarking exercise was undertaken prior to going out to tender for a new provider. The Council wants to ensure that any new provider would provide the service at an appropriate level with the funding in place to provide the service needed. Therefore having undertaken the benchmarking exercise an increase in funding was being requested.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the current substance misuse annual contract value of £492k be increased for the incumbent to allow for a sustained delivery of a mandatory* (*required by law or mandate; compulsory) service until 30th June 2021 whilst a new procurement exercise is completed (as allowable within PCR2015);
- 2) re-commissioning of the Wokingham substance misuse service be agreed. This will start with publishing a Prior Information Notice for early market engagement and awareness of the upcoming re-procurement of the substance misuse service relevant to a contract of estimated £4.5 million. (£642k per annum);
- 3) the contract value in the tender be increased to meet the anticipated demand and cost of the service.

25. WOKINGHAM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SCHOOL

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal for the provision of a new Special Education Needs School within the Borough and setting out proposed terms of the lease of the site for 125 years to the Department for Education.

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the report and advised that the school, which would be a free school, would have 150 pupils; 75 pupils from Wokingham Borough Council area and 75 from Reading Borough Council area. The Department for Education would fund the building of the school which would be run by the Maiden Erlegh Trust.

In response to a query by Councillor Kaiser, Councillor Clark confirmed that the proposed site in Winnersh was the site favoured by the Department for Education.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) support for the development and provision of a new Special Education Needs school at Winnersh Farm be supported;
- 2) the lease of the site at Winnersh Farm to the Department for Education for use as a Special Education Needs school on their model Heads of Terms be approved and the Director of Resources and Assets be delegated powers, in conjunction with the Lead Member for Business and Economic Development, to complete the lease.

26. PROCUREMENT OF COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNER'S INSURANCE COVER

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to retender the Council Commercial Property Owner's Insurance.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised that currently the Council's insurance cover was placed with a number of insurers and the intention was to seek to utilise the size and variety of the whole portfolio of assets that the Council owns in order to secure high quality cover at a competitive price with a single insurer.

In relation to the properties bought utilising the Councillor Murray queried that as the insurance applied to many buildings that the Council had bought as part of its investment fund asked how much borrowing the Council has and how much income it generates? Councillor Kaiser confirmed that the Council's net general fund external debt was at March 21st was £121m. The Council also had £84m which was money borrowed to buy social housing which actually generates £15m worth of rental income per year. In addition we have £134m of internal debt, which was money that the Council lent to itself, and there was also £180m on deposit, some of which was with other councils and invested in secure bonds. All this equates to net borrowing of £121m. The cost of financing debt falling on the taxpayer for 2020/2021 would actually be around about £7.50 per band D property which was 0.4 of a percent. The total assets of the Council was about £1,000m which more than covers the borrowing.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the procurement (by way of open competitive tender) of the insurance cover be approved;

- 2) the design of the contract specification be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive;
- 3) the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing, be delegated authority to award the contract(s) to the successful bidder(s) following completion of the evaluation process.

27. HELP TO HEAT AND ECO SCHEME

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal for a Help to Heat and ECO Scheme; the aim of which was to facilitate a widespread uptake of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to ensure that energy efficiency measures were installed in as many eligible households within the Borough as possible.

The Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions advised the meeting that improving the energy efficiency of some of the Council's least efficient homes would help reduce carbon and waste energy usage. Councillor Murray also drew the meeting's attention to the fact that one in ten households in the UK were affected by fuel poverty and this programme aimed to help alleviate the effect of this. Funding home upgrades would improve the energy efficiency of homes and consequently dramatically cut home energy costs.

Members were informed that across the Borough there were approximately 18,000 houses with an energy rating of E, F and G; the three lowest EPC energy efficiency ratings. The difference between heating identically sized three bedroomed houses rated G versus D was £516 per year i.e. £43 per month and a 27% saving. Unfortunately many of these E, F and G houses were currently part of the HRA stock and were occupied by some of the lowest income, most vulnerable, eldest or most at risk in the community.

Councillor Murray confirmed that the intention was to access the Energy Companies Obligation Fund and use that money to pay for energy saving upgrades to properties. There would be no cost to the resident and they would keep all of the savings generated by the upgrades. As part of the scheme areas where it was known that fuel poverty existed would be specifically targeted with hand delivered letters advertising the scheme and inviting them to apply. There would also be an extensive media and PR campaign. Using the Energy Companies Obligation Fund could potentially help up to 400 houses across the Borough this year with potential to help more homes in the future.

Members thanked the Officers who had investigated this proposal and who had worked diligently in order to bring the proposal forward.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Help to Heat Scheme be approved in order that the Chief Executive can sign-off Wokingham Borough Council's 'ECO FLEX Statement of Intent'. This will enable the Statement of Intent to be published on the Council's website;
- 2) the use of the wider national ECO scheme, including the advertisement to residents of their ability to access ECO grant funds, be approved.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LICENSING AND APPEALS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring (Chairman), Abdul Loyes (Vice-Chairman), Rachel Burgess, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Emma Hobbs, Sarah Kerr, Barrie Patman, Malcolm Richards, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Bill Soane

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Karen Court, Senior Licensing Officer Public Protection Partnership
Sean Murphy, Public Protection Partnership Manager
Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer - Compliance and Enforcement

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Parry Batth and Suzanne McLaughlin.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Matters arising

Councillor Burgess asked if letter about Uber, referred to on page 5, had been sent. Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer Compliance and Enforcement confirmed that the letter had been sent but no response had been received. Councillor Burgess asked that this response be chased up and Julia O'Brien agreed to follow this up.

3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

6. FEES AND CHARGES 2021/22

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Committee, on 10 November 2020.

7. STATUTORY TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE REPORT

Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer Compliance and Enforcement presented the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire report.

Julia O'Brien stated that this guidance was an attempt by the government to standardise vehicle, driver and operator's standards. She explained that although this was 'guidance', local authorities must have regard to it.

Julia O'Brien stated it was proposed that the Licensing Committee look at further reports detailing changes to conditions contained in the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy and School and Community Services Policy to comply with statutory standards. She

pointed out that the current policies already incorporated a lot of the conditions that local authorities were being commended to adhere to.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Councillor Burgess was interested to know if there were any areas which needed improvement and suggested that future reports could include Red Amber Green (RAG) rating. She also asked if there would be cost implications to drivers as a result of this review;
- Julia O'Brien stated that there may be a cost in relation to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, as drivers would be asked to sign up to the DBS update service. However, this may work out cheaper than having to do a DBS check every year;
- Councillor Kerr agreed that it would be useful to be informed of any potential gaps or areas for improvement. She asked for further clarification as to whether this government paper was statutory or guidance;
- Julia O'Brien stated that although this was guidance, local authorities were being told that they should comply with it;
- Councillor Kerr asked about the timescales in implementing the changes. Julia O'Brien stated that a wide consultation would have to be carried out, and she hoped to be able to present a report to the March meeting of the Committee;
- In response to a question Sean Murphy, Public Protection Partnership Manager stated that these policies would be approved by this Committee (not by Executive or Council);
- In response to a question Julia O'Brien stated that following all the processes, including the consultation, the final policies were likely to be ready by the summer of 2021;
- Councillor Fishwick asked how the service would obtain certificates of good character. Julia O'Brien stated that this was already in the current policy, the service asked for drivers to approach the embassy of the place where they had been away from the country for three months, and they were able provided this certificate to the service;
- Councillor Soane asked for more information about the regulations around stretched limousines. Julia O'Brien stated that stretched limousines were already in the policy and they were treated in the same way as private hire.

Upon being put to the vote, Members agreed to the recommendations contained in the report.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Members note the content of the statutory standards; and
- 2) Members agree to further reports detailing changes to conditions contained in the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy and School and Community Services Policy to comply with the statutory standards.

8. TAXIS LIAISON GROUP UPDATE

The Taxis Liaison Group Update report was presented by Karen Court, Senior Licensing Officer Public Protection Partnership.

Karen Court stated that the last meeting of the Group had taken place on 10 September 2020, and was attended by three Members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee and two members of the taxi trade.

Karen Court stated that the main points of discussion at the last meeting were:

- Fees – there had been an agreement to reduce the fees and this had already been implemented. There were no further proposals on fees. The audit exercise was being arranged by Sean Murphy.
- Age of vehicles – the Committee was being asked to consider temporarily suspending the current age limits on vehicles. It was suggested that this period be of 12 months with a defined start and end time, provided that the vehicles passed the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle test in addition to the standard MOT test and RAC test for older vehicles;
- Height of vehicles – the condition of height had been imposed to ensure compliance with Section 165 of the Equality Act 2010 (passengers on wheelchairs), it was not recommended that the Committee put forward any proposal to amend these dimensions;
- Taxi ranks – the service was working with Traffic Management. Traffic Management had confirmed that the Broad Street ranks were operational from 19 September 2020, this included the rank outside Natwest Bank and the two west of the bus stops. Additionally, there would be two new temporary evening ranks in Wokingham Market Place on the loading bays outside Boots and WH Smith. Drivers were being advised and kept up to date with information about the ranks and the situation in relation to Covid-19.

The Chairman stated that the taxi trade was facing significant difficulties at the moment due to the current pandemic, with loss of business and competition with Uber. It was the Council's intention to help the trade as much as possible during this difficult time.

Some of the comments made during the discussion of the item are listed below.

Fees

- Councillor Burgess believed that it was disingenuous to say that there were no proposals from the drivers in relation to fees. She believed that the onus was on the Council to produce a line by line audit report on the methodology;
- Sean Murphy clarified that this was in relation to the tariffs that drivers charged for their services;
- In response to a question Karen Court stated that two dates to review the fees had been proposed to the trade;
- Councillor Ferris asked if this Committee would be considering a reduction in fees during the pandemic period. Sean Murphy stated that the fees would be discussed at the meeting in November, including options around reductions (which could be applied retrospectively);
- Sean Murphy confirmed that the reductions that were agreed last year had been implemented retrospectively;
- Councillor Ferris urged the Committee to consider the fact that during the pandemic, the trade had seen its business reduced to 10-15% of what it normally was. Therefore, a reduction on fees during this period should be considered;
- Sean Murphy offered to bring information on the cost of offering a reduction on fees to the next meeting for the Committee to consider.

Age of vehicles

- Councillor Burgess stated that the fees were onerous to drivers. She stated that a line by line review of the methodology had been asked for around one year ago;

- Karen Court stated that two potential meeting dates had been proposed to the trade to continue discussions with the Group;
- Councillor Ferris stated that the Committee should consider a temporary reduction on the fees, in recognition of the difficult circumstances being faced by the trade during the current pandemic;
- Sean Murphy stated that the fees would be discussed at the next meeting. He stated that consideration should be given to the fees for this year and for next year. He stated that a reduction was implemented last year, and that it was possible to offer a retrospective reduction;

Age of vehicles

- Councillor Hobbs was in favour of extending the age of vehicles during this period, however she believed that the RAC checks should continue;
- In response to a question Karen Court stated that it was up to the Committee to decide on the age of vehicles and the RAC test condition;
- Councillor Burgess stated that RAC checks were expensive, she believed that during this current situation this condition should be suspended as vehicles were still subject to tests;
- In response to a question Karen Court stated that RAC checks were more detailed and high level than MOT tests;
- Councillor Burgess pointed out that the RAC test was only required for higher aged vehicles in order to extend their life;
- Sean Murphy pointed out that due to the loss of trade, vehicles were not doing their usual mileage, this had been much reduced;
- Councillor Fishwick proposed that the age of vehicles be extended and a suspension of the RAC check for a period of 12 months, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, and that this measures be kept under review;
- Councillor Loyes asked how many vehicles in the fleet were affected by the 15 year age limit. Officers agreed to find out and report back on this;
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey believed that it was important to know how many vehicles would be affected by the 15 year age limit;
- Councillor Burgess seconded Councillor Fishwick's proposal;
- Councillor Ferris believed that it was important to put some measures in place to help the taxi trade during this time of the pandemic;
- Councillor Firmager was in favour of the proposal, especially in view of the fact that vehicles were not having the wear and tear that they would normally have.

Upon being put to the vote, there was general agreement from the Committee that the trade should be supported during this time by extending the age limit and suspending the RAC checks for a period of 12 months, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, to be kept under review (Councillor Hobbs abstained from the vote).

Height of vehicle

- In response to a question, Karen Court stated that the height of vehicle condition had been imposed in order to make sure that hackney carriages were able to take a wheelchair passenger. The service recommended that no changes be made to this condition. However, the trade had been asking that the height be reduced to enable different vehicles which were not wheelchair accessible to be used as hackney carriages;
- Councillor Burgess stated that the trade had been lobbying to reduce the height requirement for a long time. She stated that other local authorities seemed to have a

requirement of wheelchair accessibility, without stating the height of the vehicle. She agreed that hackney carriages should be wheelchair accessible but questioned whether 54' was the correct height requirement;

- The Chairman believed that this requirement was linked to the Equalities Act;
- Sean Murphy stated that the 54' requirement came about as a result of trying to ensure that a passenger on a wheelchair would be able to enter the vehicle seating in a wheelchair through the gap in the back of the vehicle. The 54' was introduced as a result of it coming to light, some years ago, that there were many vehicles in the fleet that were not wheelchair compatible. At the time, the vehicles that were affected by this were given five years to become wheelchair accessible;
- Councillor Richards stated that prior to the 54' requirement there had been an indication of which vehicles could be used as hackney carriage, however drivers did not want to be limited to a number of makes of vehicles. Upon inspection, a lot of the modified vehicles in the fleet that were inspected, failed to comply with wheelchair accessibility; consequently a recommendation was made that a height measurement inside of the vehicle should be used as a condition instead of naming makes of vehicles;
- Sean Murphy stated that there were purpose built vehicles available which were suitable, most issues were in relation to converted vehicles;
- Councillor Ferris stated that a comprehensive review of the height of vehicles had taken place previously, and the vehicles affected still had three years to adapt to the condition. In his opinion it was important to be clear to drivers as to what the requirement is;
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey stated that it was important to ensure the standards of hackney carriages within the fleet;
- Councillor Kerr proposed that this issue be brought back to the Committee with a review of the methodology that was used to determine the 54' height requirement, and to decide if 54' is the right height; she was seconded by Councillor Burgess;
- Councillor Soane agreed that it could be confusing trying to find a vehicle that was compliant with the requirement, he also stated that there were other issues to be considered, such as the gradient of the ramp to enter the vehicle;
- Councillor Fishwick referenced the Aylesbury Vale's condition (page 11 of the supplementary agenda) and asked if this was the standard that should be used in Wokingham;
- Sean Murphy confirmed that purpose built vehicles were usually compliant to wheelchair access. He suggested circulating information to Members when available and formally reviewing the height issue at the March meeting of the Committee and; Members were in agreement with this suggestion.

After a robust debate, Members agreed to review the height of vehicles at the March meeting, with information about the methodology that was used to determine the 54', a comparison exercise with other local authorities and other possible alternatives.

In response to a question the Chairman stated that the Taxis Liaison Group was an informal group which comprised Members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee and members of the trade. The frequency of meetings depended on the issues arising for discussion.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Proposals around reducing the fees during the pandemic would be considered at the next meeting in November;

- 2) The current age limit be extended for a period 12 months, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021;
- 3) The RAC check requirement be suspended for a period of 12 months, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021;
- 4) These measures will be kept under review; and
- 5) The height of vehicles will be reviewed at the March meeting of the Committee

9. ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Annual Report 2019/20 was presented by Julia O'Brien.

Julia O'Brien stated that the report contained an overview of the work of the Licensing Service and the Licensing and Appeals Committee and Sub-Committee over the last year. The report also contained comparative data in relation to the number of applications.

In response to a question, Sean Murphy stated that animal boarders had been badly affected by the pandemic, the fees for that sector would be reviewed at the next meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Burgess stated that the report did not reflect a number of issues within Licensing that had occurred during the past year, which were not mentioned in the report. She expressed frustration that the meeting in June had been cancelled due lack of business, when in her opinion there were issues that should have been discussed. She stated that the taxi trade felt continually let down by Licensing and this Committee. She believed that the Committee should have been reviewing measures to help the trade, in the context of the pandemic, much earlier; some drivers were already considering giving up or had already given up their licences.

Councillor Burgess expressed frustration that the Criteria Policy for Licensed Vehicles was reviewed in June 2018, agreed in September 2018 but was not published until July this year, despite many requests that it be published. She also mentioned issues around animal boarders' fees.

Councillor Burgess recognised that some good work had been undertaken, for example in raising standards.

The Chairman pointed out that the Council had helped many businesses during the pandemic, and that the taxis' fees had been reduced in the past year.

Councillor Richards observed huge variations in the number of applications this year and last year, he asked if these were new applications or renewals. Julia O'Brien stated that the figures represented a mixture of new and renewal applications.

Sean Murphy offered to review the figures, including the number of licences that were lost due to Covid-19, and present it to the Committee at its next meeting.

Councillor Kerr was interested to know the narrative behind the complaints listed in the report, and how many were complaints against the service. She also asked about Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the service.

Julia O'Brien stated that there were not many KPIs for Licensing, apart from a KPI in relation to 28 days to inspect a new Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS). Sean Murphy agreed to bring more information about KPI's and complaints back to the Committee.

Julia O'Brien stated that the complaints referred to a wide range of issues, including any complaints about a licensed premise or the service. Complaints relating to the PPP were collated by an Officer within the PPP and were not included in this report.

Councillor Ferris stated that a number of Members in the Committee had concerns about some elements within the report.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The additional information in relation to complaints and KPI's will be provided to the Committee at its next meeting

10. FORWARD PLAN

Julia O'Brien presented the Forward Plan report and stated that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for 10 November 2020, and not in March as stated in the report.

Julia O'Brien confirmed that the items in the Forward Plan were:

- Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards – amendments to Policy;
- Taxi and Private Hire Convictions Policy – annual review
- Taxis Liaison Group update
- Fees and Charges
- Annual report – updated figures

Councillor Kerr asked that a report be brought to the Committee on the EU transition period and its implications on Licensing. Sean Murphy stated that this was still unknown, he would inform the Committee when relevant information was available.

Councillor Ferris expressed concern that this Committee might not have an opportunity to discuss and influence the Fees and Charges before its submission to the Executive. The Chairman stated that the report would be discussed at the next meeting in November, before the Executive meeting. The Chairman also stated that any issues could be raised and discussed with Officers before the next meeting.

Sean Murphy stated that the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) shared service recommended the Fees and Charges to the three local authorities. Their proposal then was then submitted to the Licensing Committee for recommendations before its submission to the Executive and Council. Sean Murphy also stated that there would be a consultation with the taxi trade on fees.

Sean Murphy stated that the fees and charges report contained in the report that was in the agenda pack was going to form the basis for the discussion at the next meeting.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD
HELD ON 8 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 5.00 PM TO 5.30 PM**

Present

Charles Margetts	Wokingham Borough Council
Carol Cammiss	Director, Children's Services
Chris Trill	Director Place and Growth
UllaKarin Clark	Wokingham Borough Council
Philip Cook	Voluntry Sector
John Halsall	Wokingham Borough Council
David Hare	Wokingham Borough Council
Susan Parsonage	Chief Executive
Matt Pope	Director, Adult Social Care & Health
Katie Summers	Director of Operations, Berkshire West CCG
Jim Stockley	Healthwatch
Meradin Peachey (substituting Tessa Lindfield)	Public Health

Also Present:

Madeleine Shopland	Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Rachel Bishop-Firth	
Ingrid Slade	Public Health
Peter Slade	Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership Project Support
Martin Sloan	Assistant Director ASC Transformation and Integration

16. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sam Burrows, Tessa Lindfield and Debbie Milligan.

17. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 10 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will signed by the Chairman at the next available date.

18. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

19. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

20. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

20.1 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Chairman of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board the following question:

Question

What steps is the Council taking to protect our older and our BAME residents who are both statistically at much higher risk from Covid-19 during this current second spike of the pandemic, BAME people currently make up 16.4% of WBC residents, and in particular, will we be helping to publicise the importance of Vitamin D for older and BAME people?

Many medical professionals are concerned that there may be a link between vitamin D deficiency and higher rates of Covid mortality as a deficiency affects your ability to fight infection. While research is still underway, the problems with vitamin D deficiency are so well known that before the pandemic, NHS guidance suggested that BAME Brits should 'consider' taking vitamin D supplements year round (and white Brits to consider a supplement Oct to March). Care home residents have a particularly high risk of vitamin D deficiency.

Publicising this simple step which local residents can take to safeguard their health could be very quick and cost effective.

Answer:

The protection of our residents vulnerable to Covid infection, including older residents and BAME residents is a priority for WBC.

In addition to the extensive work we have undertaken with the care homes via the Care Homes Task Force we continue to work really closely with the voluntary sector within Wokingham and have extended funding to continue our one front door service until March 2021, as I am sure you have seen. This is run by CAB Wokingham, they are taking calls and emails from residents and putting them in contact with any people and organisations that they need. This includes prescription collections or shopping service but also helps with a range of other Covid related effects such as debt advice, job loss, benefit advice as well as important support for mental health and wellbeing. The Wokingham Borough Community Response is an additional support service to the NHS and social services.

We are working with CAB Wokingham, First Days, the LINK Visiting Scheme, Involve Community Services and the Wokingham Volunteer Centre, as well as our Town and Parish Councils, Age UK, Churches Together and other churches and voluntary organisations across the Borough.

In August, the Council launched 'Tackling Racism Matters' which is an online survey providing an anonymous platform for both the wider community and staff to share opportunities to tackle racial inequalities (which affect risk of Covid infections and deaths) in Wokingham. In addition, the Council has launched the Covid impact survey to understand how Covid has affected BAME groups during lockdown. The findings from this survey will continue to inform our response going forward and will obviously effect how we behave.

Working with the Public health team, WBC are cascading tailored health promotion (as developed by Public Health England) to inform specific ethnic groups about minimising their risk to Covid transmission and mortality. The promotion materials have been adapted into different languages.

The NHS test and trace system has been designed to ensure that anyone who develops the symptoms of Covid 19 can quickly be tested to find out if they have the virus, and the service also includes targeted asymptomatic testing of NHS staff, social care staff and care home residents. The test and trace service is an equal-access service that does not discriminate on the basis of age, ethnicity or religious beliefs. You will be aware of course of the recent decision of the Council to procure some tests of its own, testing for emergency use.

In June 2020, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published an appraisal of the evidence relating to vitamin D in the prevention of Covid. This study states that “there is no evidence to support taking vitamin D supplements to specifically prevent or treat Covid-19. However, all people should continue to follow UK Government advice on daily vitamin D supplementation to maintain bone and muscle health during the pandemic”. The UK Government advise that all people should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D during autumn and winter months. They also advise that people whose skin has little to no exposure to sunlight and ethnic minority groups with dark skin, from African, Afro-Caribbean and South Asian backgrounds, should consider taking a vitamin D supplement all year round.

Since there is no evidence to support taking vitamin D supplementation to prevent Covid there are no plans to promote the importance of vitamin D with regard to Covid. However, we will keep this fully under review and keep our eyes open for any new evidence that should come to light. If we see anything on these lines, we will of course review that position. As with everything in relation to this pandemic our position is that we are taking the best advice, listening to what is going on, and making the best judgment we can, and just keep moving forwards as things develop.

Supplementary Question

To protect the NHS and care services, free flu vaccinations are available for older residents, and now to shielding residents, care home staff and their families. There are already some worrying signs that there will not be enough vaccinations available for those who want them, with some local providers having no vaccine in stock. Do we believe that there will be enough flu vaccinations available this year and how will we handle any shortfall?

Answer

The CCG and wider BOB flu team are in wider contact with the NHS and Public Health to monitor and oversee the successful supply and provision of flub jab services for patients across Berkshire West. So far, we have not had any issues or delays reported to us re the delivery of pre orders to practices. We anticipate further guidance and advice this week from NHSE, explaining how our practices can order nationally procured vaccines. The getting of this stock is vital to ensuring our practices can further achieve the national vaccination targets, set by NHSE, and meet the additional patient demand that we have seen this year.

Pharmacies will also have access to ordering from the NHSE stock in a few weeks. All I will say is that I know from sitting in other meetings of this Board, that stock was ordered in January before, for the winter. But obviously stock ordered in January 2020 was before the pandemic hit.

Katie Summers:

That response is exactly what we would say as well from Charles regarding the flu. We have not necessarily seen anything at all that is a supply issue at all, at the moment. Actually, we keep on getting general updates directly. We are working very, very closely with the local Public Health teams, as Charles said. We are very much on top of things.

The only comment I was going to supply for the vitamin D piece is that Charles is very, very right. We will actually take a decision when anything physically changes, and one thing that we have in the health service, we have what is known as a Thames Valley Priorities Committee and they respond so, so quickly to the latest evidence. That Priorities Committee, if there is anything that changes relating to the BAME community, they will act on it straight away and there will be policy that goes out across all clinicians to give them the guidance. That is just backing up what Charles was saying about the vitamin D.

Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth:

I personally have been unable to book for a flu jab vaccination. I spoke to the pharmacy at one of the local supermarkets who said that they did not know when the stock would be coming in.

Katie Summers:

This is the ongoing thing. They are prioritising certain areas and certain groups at the moment. It might be the fact that, Rachel, you look very, very young, and it might be to do with that factor as well. So please do not worry about it. Have you been contacted by your GP practice yet? That might be the reason why then. What they are doing are, they are doing almost like a wave of individuals, so you are probably not in that wave at the moment, so that is the reason why. Please be reassured that it is going to be rolled out. What they are having to do is get the stock in and then they have to do certain waves at certain points, and that is the process that we take forwards.

21. STRATEGY INTO ACTION

Ingrid Slade presented the Strategy into Action.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Three Actions Groups were being established, each of which aligned with one of the three key priorities of the Wokingham Wellbeing Strategy; creating physically active communities, reducing social isolation and loneliness, and narrowing health inequalities. The aim of each group was to develop a stronger understanding of the performance and successes of work being carried out both inside and outside the Council, to help with future planning.
- The Physically Active Communities Group would be co-chaired by Sports and Leisure. The first meeting of the group would take place in the first week of November.
- The Reducing Isolation Group would be co-chaired by Phil Cook of Involve. Discussions would take place regarding available evidence to assess the level of need in the Borough. The Group would hopefully meet before the end of the year.
- The Health Inequalities Group would work closely with Children's Services. It would hopefully meet for the first time in early December.
- Draft terms of reference had been drawn up and would be agreed by the individual Groups.
- The Groups would have a standard reporting mechanism into the Wellbeing Board.

- Councillor Margetts suggested that Jake Morrison from the voluntary sector be invited to be involved with the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Group. Covid would have a huge impact on the work of this. Ingrid Slade re-emphasised that the voluntary sector would be heavily involved in this group. Phil Cook commented that he was co chairing as part of the Friendship Alliance (Age UK Berkshire, LINK visiting scheme and Wokingham Volunteer Centre) which had been very involved in the Covid response. There was a Voluntary Sector Action Group meeting every Monday.
- Martin Sloan added that part of the reason for establishing the Friendship Alliance was to tackle social isolation. Funding had been put in place to tackle social isolation. Martin Sloan suggested that a presentation on the progress being made in tackling social isolation be provided to a future meeting.
- Katie Summers commented that many of the long-term success markers for the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Group, related to children. She questioned how the education support services would be involved in this. Ingrid Slade and Carol Cammiss agreed to take this forwards. They were also to have involvement of care leavers or representatives of care leavers.
- With regards to the Narrowing Health Inequalities Group, Katie Summers indicated that the NHS had been set an action plan on reducing health inequalities and had eight impact changes that had to be delivered by December next year, including; to protect the most vulnerable from Covid, restoring NHS services inclusively, digital inclusion, proactive engagement and prevention, mental health, leadership, completing timely data sets, and collaborative local plan and delivery. Increasing the accuracy and availability of data was vital. Katie Summers offered to work with Ingrid Slade to help tie these eight priorities into the work of the Reducing Health Inequalities Group.
- The Board were informed that there had been some changes to the GP contract and that each GP practice had to increase the coding of ethnicity in their patients as it was now mandated within their contract.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the progress in the establishment of three Action Groups, as outlined in the accompanying presentation (Appendix A), to deliver on the Wellbeing Board objectives, be reviewed.
- 2) the co-chairs, key stakeholders/membership, Action Group objectives, proposed terms of reference, meeting agendas and frequency of meetings and deliverables, be noted.
- 3) input from Board members on these Action Groups and progress to date be invited.
- 4) the summary of progress captured to end of September 2020 be noted. These short summary reports will remain in place and until formal reporting is implemented (Appendix B).

22. DESIGNING OUR NEIGHBOURHOODS UPDATE

Martin Sloan provided an update in Designing our Neighbourhoods.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Martin Sloan advised the Board that the workshop would put back until later, due to other priorities around Covid. However, work was still ongoing at neighbourhood level.
- Katie Summers referred to the successful focus on mental health. With the support of the Citizens Advice Bureau, the 'One front door' service was being rolled out. Some motivational interview training had also been carried out and 30% of attendees had been from the Council.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

23. COVID SITUATION REPORT

Ingrid Slade provided an update on the Covid situation.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- The national and local picture was of a rise in Covid cases. Wokingham had had 820 cases since the beginning of the outbreak, a rate of 479 per 100,000. This was well below the England average of 827 per 100,000.
- The increase in cases represented an increase in community transition. There had been a rise in cases across the Borough.
- Wokingham Borough continued to have no excess mortality due to Covid at present.

RESOLVED: That the Covid situation update be noted.

24. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Board considered the forward programme.

Councillor Margetts advised the Board of prioritisation sessions regarding the Joint Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy on 5 November 2-3.30pm and 10 November 2-3.30pm.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.25 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser (Vice-Chairman), Prue Bray, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Wayne Smith

Parish/Town Council Representatives: Sally Gurney (Wokingham Town Council)

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services
Jennifer Lee, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer

28. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Gary Cowan, Graham Howe and Roy Mantel (Twyford Parish Council).

29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

30. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

33. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Town or Parish Council questions.

34. CONSULTATION ON WBC CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 7 to 28, which gave details of a public consultation document on the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors.

The report stated that the Committee had agreed to carry out a consultation exercise relating to the overall provisions of the Code of Conduct and specific changes agreed in principle by Members.

Appended to the report was the draft consultation document and a copy of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Model Member Code of Conduct. It was considered that the Council's Code of Conduct was consistent with the provisions in the LGA model code.

It was proposed to run the consultation exercise up to 11 December 2020. Any feedback would then be considered by the Committee at its meeting in January 2021. Specific feedback would be sought from Town and Parish Councils as they shared the WBC Code of Conduct.

Following approval by the Committee, in January 2021, the amended Code of Conduct would be submitted to the Constitution Review Working Group prior to approval by the full Council.

Sally Gurney suggested that the consultation document should include reference to the seven “Nolan” principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Code of Conduct consultation document be confirmed, subject to inclusion of the seven Nolan principles of public life;
- 2) the Committee receive a further report, at its meeting in January 2021, on the results of the public consultation;
- 3) following agreement on the final changes to the Code of Conduct, a report be submitted to the Constitution Review Working Group prior to approval by the full Council;
- 4) the LGA Model Member Code of Conduct be noted.

35. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 29 to 34, which gave details of progress relating to Code of Conduct complaints investigated since the previous meeting.

The report stated that, since the 1 July 2020 meeting, three new complaints had been received. A summary of the complaints was appended to the report together with progress in resolving earlier, ongoing complaints.

Andrew Moulton (Monitoring Officer) confirmed that two additional complaints had been received, details of which would be included in the report to the next meeting of the Committee.

In the ongoing discussion, Members raised the following points:

Members reiterated earlier concerns about the timeframe for investigation and reporting the outcome of Code of Conduct complaints.

It was noted that a number of complaints related to a perceived lack of social distancing by Members attending public events. Members felt that the Standards Committee was not the appropriate body to deal with alleged breaches of the social distancing guidelines.

It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer write to all Members to remind them of the importance of social distancing at public events and to advise them on appropriate steps to take in the event that constituents accidentally breached the distancing guidelines whilst discussing local issues or seeking advice.

RESOLVED: That the update report on Code of Conduct complaints be noted.

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.06 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive)

Executive Members Present

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing)

38. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Paul Fishwick, Emma Hobbs, and Graham Howe.

Caroline Smith attended the meeting as a substitute for Paul Fishwick.

Chris Bowring attended the meeting as a substitute for Graham Howe.

Pauline Helliar-Symons attended the meeting as a substitute for Emma Hobbs.

39. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Guy Grandison proposed that Emma Hobbs be appointed as Vice Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year. This was seconded by Alison Swaddle.

RESOLVED That Emma Hobbs be appointed as Vice Chairman for the remainder of the municipal year.

41. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

42. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

43. MTFP 2021-24: STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

The Committee received a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 16, which gave a strategic overview of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2021-24.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing) and Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Graham Ebers stated that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) remained the lowest funded Unitary Authority per head of population. The revenue support grant received by WBC not totalled £0, and as Council Tax was now considered a resource WBC was now seen as a highly resourced Local Authority. Graham stated that WBC needed to continue

to make representations to MPs and the Government to ensure that WBC was adequately funded to cover the costs of statutory service delivery.

Graham stated that the impact of Covid-19 (C-19) would not fit neatly into one financial year, and therefore the cost implications needed to be looked at on a more medium term level. The expectation was that the adult social care precept would be allowed once more due to the financial pressures related to this service as a result of C-19. The Children's Services department was still in the process of achieving a "Good" OFSTED rating, with expenditure being detailed within the MTFP, and detailed bids would be received by the Committee in the coming weeks and months. The 21st Century reorganisation had saved £3m per annum in efficiency savings and staffing reductions. Graham stated that the government's consultation proposals regarding housing numbers would, if approved, place significant budgetary pressure on WBC in addition to increasing demand on all of our services. Graham added that the MTFP was a work in progress plan, and urged all Members to make representations to MPs and the Government for a fair 4 year Local Government finance settlement.

John Kaiser stated that last year was the first year where the draft MTFP had received detailed consideration by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. John added that a similar approach would be taken this year, and he hoped for productive and positive discussions to take place. Much work had already been undertaken in order to achieve a balanced budget, and a portion of the 2021/22 budget would be funded by WBC's reserves in addition to the awaited Local Government finance settlement for the upcoming year. John stated that although WBC's reserves were at a safe level, there were many unknowns that needed to be considered this year as these were unprecedented times.

Graham Ebers stated that Resources and Assets were due to make large savings in 2020/21, which would allow for the budget submissions from that year be an overall net saving compared to the previous year. WBC had now engaged in a commercialisation programme, which looked at a variety of areas such as early intervention, prevention, and demand management. WBC's asset stock would be evaluated, and further options to utilise technology within business operations would be investigated. Graham stated that the current prediction of £1.689 million budget variance would look to be addressed via efficiency savings, with the fall back of using reserves in the worst case. WBC would have exceeded the balancing of the budget by approximately £2m for 2020/21, however there was a carryover of £3.5m from the previous financial year. Graham was of the opinion that WBC were in a positive position in the medium term, however this had to be viewed in the context of a series of unknown factors.

Graham Ebers stated that every 1% of Council tax that was not collected amounted to an approximate loss of £1.17m to WBC, and a 99% collection rate had been assumed within the MTFP. Similarly, a 99% collection rate had been assumed for the collection of business rates, and every 1% of business rates that were not collected amounted to an approximate loss of £0.526m to WBC. With the Government furlough scheme coming to an end, WBC needed to be mindful of the potential additional demand on our services and resources, in addition to a possible loss in the income collection rate. With the Local Government finance settlement unknown, and items such as the public health grant, new homes bonus, community infrastructure levy (CIL) and Section 106 (S106) facing an uncertain future, the MTFP needed to be viewed within the context of this uncertain future.

John Kaiser stated that all rough sleepers who wished to accept WBC's offer to find them accommodation had been taken off of the street, and there was a strong desire to maintain this. Members and officers recognised the costs and pressures placed on individuals and families within the Borough, and WBC did not want to add to the woes of these individual and families. John added that it fell on all Members and officers to allow rough sleepers to continue to have access to suitable accommodation.

During the ensuing discussions, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Were the projected £200k savings as a result of commercialisation net savings after the cost of employing the staff involved in the project? Officer response – Yes, the £200k savings were a net saving. The persons working on this project were from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), who had a considerable knowledge base and worked with a wide range of Local Authorities.
- Was the Council Tax collection rate prediction to optimistic? Executive Member and officer response – WBC was currently achieving a 98.5% collection rate. Letters had been sent out to approximately 2000 residents, 1000 of which had now agreed a restructure. Of the other 1000 residents, further correspondence would be sent to try and agree a restructure. Including where a restructure had been agreed, WBC was currently 0.2% above our collection rate target. The Government had extended the period for Local Authorities to address their collection rate figures to 3 years. In addition, the MTFP assumed a modest 1% increase in the Council Tax base, which would be higher in all likelihood.
- What was the Council Tax base increase in the previous year? Officer response – This would be checked and an answer provided to the Committee.
- How much was C-19 costing each directorate specifically? Officer response – This was set out within the revenue monitoring report that is received periodically by the Executive Committee, with the next report due in October. There would be quite a number of special items within the MTFP as these would help address short term issues with one off funding.
- What was seen as an adequate level of reserves, and how was this defined? Officer response – There was no exact science to a safe level of reserves, but in general an adequate level of reserves would cover all medium and high risks, and this was deemed to be around the £10m level for WBC. The figure of £10m was at the more prudent end of the scale, and anywhere significantly below £7m would become a concern. The general fund balance was predicted to be at around the £7m level at the end of the financial year, and this budget sought to restore that to some degree.
- Were there any costs associated with the new income streams, both proposed and implemented? Officer response – If capital costs were involved, these costs would form part of the capital programme. The return from the scheme must recover the capital costs and exceed this value to appear as an income stream and therefore a saving line within the MTFP.
- What would the financial effect be should the CIL and S106 calculations be changed? Executive Member response – If changes were made to CIL or S106, appropriate infrastructure would still need to be delivered to accommodate any new dwellings. It could be a possibility that it was the responsibility of the developer to provide the

infrastructure in future, however it would preferably continue to be delivered by Local Authorities as it gave us more control.

- What were the areas of growth within Children's Services, and how was any overspend within this service taken into account? Officer response – The detailed bids would be provided at a future Committee meeting, however in general a large part of the growth was needed to continue the journey to a "Good" OFSTED rating. There was not a significant level of overspend within Children's Services this year, and any overspend was valuable information for future years' budget setting.
- Were the suggested saving from the Council Tax reduction scheme ambitious considering the current economic circumstances? Executive Member and officer response – The suggested savings were based on current data, and this was subject to change. There was no intention to reduce access to this scheme for those who needed it, and the proposals were currently out for consultation and a more positive announcement was hopefully forthcoming. There was no expectation for the costs of C-19 to fall upon those who could least afford it within the Borough.
- What was an average amount of money received through CIL and S106 in an average year? Executive Member and officer response – This figure differed between financial years, as it was linked to housing numbers and specific projects. On a very rough estimate, approximately £100m-£120m could be received over a 3 year period.
- Was there any prediction as to the 4 year Local Government finance settlement value? Officer response – Officers were presuming a replication of the last one year financial settlement for the next financial year. Beyond this, it was almost impossible to assume a longer term funding figure, and it was more important than ever for WBC to continue to make representations to MPs and the Government to ensure that ongoing funding covered the basic costs associated with running a Unitary Authority.
- What was the view on Local Authorities commercially investing, and did this bring about value to WBC? Executive Member response – There had been a lot of bad press surrounding this issue due to a number of Local Authorities who were aggressively pursuing this as a funding strategy. WBC had a very prudent approach to this strategy, which amounted to approximately 8% of the investment compared to the most involved Local Authorities investment patterns. WBC were investing to resource and deliver local affordable homes, whilst receiving a modest investment to help resource other Council services.
- Had there been any change regarding the discussions around a negative revenue support grant for WBC? Officer response – WBC had won this argument thanks to strong representations to MPs and the Government. However there was a concern that the effects of a policy such as this could be seen within the future 4 year settlement, and therefore strong representations needed to continue.
- Should a negative revenue support grant be implemented, would almost all Services be funded via Council Tax? Officer response – Should WBC had lost the negative revenue support grant argument, we would have headed towards a 100% Council Tax funding programme. Having won that argument, approximately 85% of Council Services were funded by Council Tax.

- What were the predicted reserve levels in 2021/22? Officer response – This was expected to be in the region of £10m, however as previously stated this was subject to change due to unprecedented times.
- Any reductions of the reserve fund would trend it towards potentially concerning levels, and it was therefore crucial that the Committee assessed the deliverability of proposals and the impacts of any savings. Executive Member response – WBC must act responsibly, as we have a duty of care to our residents via delivery of statutory services. The intention at the moment was to end this financial year with a reserve balance of approximately £7m, and then increase this value to £10m in the following financial year.
- Children’s Services had been overspent in recent years. Were WBC more confident of less overspend in this area in the upcoming financial year? Executive Member response – Children’s Services were on the journey to achieve a “Good” OFSTED rating, and it was now felt that the Service was in a position to recognise the costs of Service delivery with less reliance on supplementary budgets.
- Was there anything that the officers and Executive Members wanted from the Committee specifically, in order to help scrutinise the MTFP proposals? Executive Member and officer response – For context, a £13m funding gap was present at the start of this year’s budget formulation, however via the Corporate Leadership Team and Member engagement this figure now sat at £1.7m, which was significantly better than the situation faced by some Local Authorities. In essence, it was incredible that officers and Members had reached this point. It was hoped that the Committee would continue to engage in respectful questioning and Scrutiny, in order to identify productive areas of exploration.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) John Kaiser and Graham Ebers be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) Detailed bids related to each Service Directorate be provided to the Committee at future meetings;
- 3) Executive Members and Officers be invited to attend the appropriate Committee meetings to assist the Committee with their review of each Service area’s growth and savings proposals;
- 4) The Council Tax base increase figure for the previous year be provided to the Committee.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SCHOOLS FORUM
HELD ON 14 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 10.00 AM TO 12.17 PM**

Schools Representatives

Carol Simpson	School Business Manager - Colleton Primary
Emma Clarke	Primary Head - Farley Hill Primary
Corrina Gillard	Primary Head - Emmbrook Infant
Brian Prebble	Primary Head - Rivermead Primary - Vice Chairman
Ali Brown	Primary Head - Nine Mile Ride Primary
Julia Mead	School Business Manager - St Sebastian's CE Primary
Ben Godber	Academy Head - Bohunt School
Derren Gray	Academy Head - Piggott School
Ginny Rhodes	Academy Head - St Crispins School
Paul Miller	Governor - St Crispins - Chairman
Shirley Austin	Academy Head - Forest School
Sian Lehrter	School Business Director - The Holt School
Sara Attra	Special School Head - Addington School
Liz Woodards	School Business Manager - Hawkedon Primary
Jay Blundell	Pupil Referral Unit Head - Foundry College

Non School Representatives

Sal Thirlway	Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships
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Also Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist
Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist
Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Paul Miller was elected Chairman of Schools Forum for the 2020/21 academic year.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Brian Prebble was appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2020/21 academic year.

3 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Kerry Clifford and Nick McSweeney.

4 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Derren Gray, on the basis that he was the Headteacher for the school that would be asking to submit a request for disapplication to the Department for Education (DfE). Derren Gray left the meeting for that item and did not take part in any discussions or vote.

5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 15 July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to a typing correction on page 10 (where it said '*principals*' it should read principles), and would be signed at a later date by the Chairman.

6 MATTERS ARISING UPDATE

All matters arising would be covered during discussions at the meeting.

7 2020/21 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT

Katherine Vernon, Schools Finance Manager presented the 2020/21 Revenue Monitoring report.

Katherine Vernon stated that an in-year deficit of £2.6m was projected, with the pressure continuing to be within the High Needs Block (HNB). Taken with the brought forward deficit of £3.36m, a forecast cumulative deficit of £5.98m was now projected to 31 March 2021.

Katherine Vernon stated that there was a further deficit movement of £1.09m on the figure reported previously to Schools Forum, the main movements were due to increased numbers and costs across:

- Out of Borough maintained
- Post-16
- Independent Special and Non-Maintained

Katherine Vernon stated that schools were facing additional financial pressures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Carol Simpson stated that a lot of schools were talking about the loss of income resulting from the current situation. However, there was no joined up approach to deal with the situation as yet;
- Ian Morgan stated that although Early Years was funded differently from schools, the sector was also facing significant financial difficulties as a result of loss of income during this period;
- Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning Achievement and Partnerships stated that he welcomed a dialogue with Schools Forum to form a long term strategy to deal with the current challenges;
- In relation to the exceptional costs associated with coronavirus claims that had been approved by the Department for Education (DfE), Jay Blundell asked if there was a pattern to a successful claim;
- Katherine Vernon stated that she did not know the specifics of each school's claims;
- Paul Miller suggested that best practice should be shared with schools, and asked for ideas as to how best to discuss and communicate this information to schools;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the local authority could put forward a claim to the DfE on Schools Forum's behalf;
- In response to a question Lynne Samuel, Senior Finance Specialist confirmed that additional financial pressures on schools, as a result of the pandemic, were anticipated this year. Schools Forum would be kept informed through the regular revenue monitoring of maintained schools; she pointed out that the local authority did not have the same level of information for academy schools. She agreed to contact schools about their challenges during this time and report back to Schools Forum.

Schools Forum considered that the Primary and Secondary Headteacher groups and other groups would be the best place to carry out discussions about how to deal with the financial losses resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Carol Simpson suggested that schools be contacted by the local authority to ascertain their position in relation to loss of income during this time. Katherine Vernon stated that maintained schools had already been contacted during the summer and there was an indication of a loss of £600k in income. Lynne Samuel stated that it was the service's intention to continue to gather information and share it with Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The next monitoring report will include more information around the financial pressures being faced by schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.

8 2020/21 CONTINGENCY UPDATE

Katherine Vernon presented the 2020/21 Contingency Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there were no allocations from the de-delegated fund to date in 2021 and that the Early Years Provider Reserve Fund of £203,376 was fully allocated in 2019/20.

Katherine Vernon stated that the Early Years Task and Finish Group would meet again in January to discuss the formula and budget setting for the following year.

Ian Morgan stated that the sector appreciated the recent payment from the contingency fund which had been made to providers.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

9 2021/22 DSG BUDGET PLANNING UPDATE

Katherine Vernon presented the 2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Budget Planning Update report.

Katherine Vernon stated that there had been an overall increase of 4% to the 2021/22 allocation compared to this year's allocation, the Early Years allocation would be known in December.

Katherine Vernon stated that the DfE had made limited changes to the funding arrangements due to the pandemic, as listed in the report. The Task and Finish Group had met, gone through various models and put forward recommendations as listed in the report.

Katherine Vernon stated that a consultation was sent out to schools in September on the principles to be applied to the 2021/22 Schools Budget. Schools were asked five questions and the responses received were as follows:

- 1) Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) to keep it at 1% - 80% said yes
- 2) Transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to another Block - 52% said yes

- 3) Keeping the primary to secondary ratio at 1:1.29 – 92% said yes
- 4) To move towards the National Funding Formula (NFF) Factors over 3 years – 96% said yes
- 5) Mobility factor – whether to move towards the NFF – 68% said yes

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Corrina Gillard stated that she had discussed question number 2 with her cluster and she found that the question had not been clear to schools. Schools in her cluster had asked that it be reported to Schools Forum that if the question had been clearer they would have replied 'no';
- Lynne Samuel stated that the question about moving 0.5% was about the principle of moving it to another Block; she believed that the result represented a more positive response than in previous years;
- Corrina Gillard stated that Headteachers needed more information about the Blocks in order to make an informed decision;
- Derren Gray stated that the option to transfer 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB had not been discussed at the Task and Finish Group because Schools Forum had not been in favour of this option in the past. He asked if there was a breakdown of the responses and Katherine Vernon stated that there was not, as the survey was anonymous;
- Sal Thirlway indicated that the closing date for the local authority to make a disapplication request to the DfE was 20 November;
- Brian Prebble stated that schools needed a better understanding of how the money would be used in order to make an informed decision;
- Corrina Gillard pointed out that schools were facing financial difficulties due to the current situation and needed to fully understand how this would impact their budgets;
- Ginny Rhodes stated that the percentage of schools that responded 'yes' to the question was not significantly high. She believed that members of Schools Forum had a good understanding of how the Blocks worked and were in a better position to make a decision;
- Ben Godber was of the opinion that schools should be consulted again with more information;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the local authority had to have regards to the results of the survey, he offered to consult again with schools on this point;
- Shirley Austin stated that the wording of the consultation had been vague, and she asked that Schools Forum review the wording of any further surveys to ensure that questions were made clear to schools.

Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum decided that the local authority should consult with schools again, with a clearly worded question, about the possibility of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the HNB. It was agreed that the Task and Finish Group would review the wording of the question before this was sent out to schools.

Lynne Samuel stated that the local authority was only required to apply for a disapplication if Schools Forum was not in favour of it and the local authority believed that it was the right approach.

It was agreed that the outcome of the consultation would be shared with Schools Forum. Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum decided that it would support the outcome of the survey.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted;
- 2) Schools would be consulted again about the possibility of transferring 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block; and
- 3) Schools Forum would support the outcome of the survey.

10 SCHOOL ADMISSIONS TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE

The School Admissions Task and Finish Group Update report was presented by Sal Thirlway.

Sal Thirlway stated that the School Admissions Task and Finish Group was being created to replace School Admissions Forum, and it would report to Schools Forum. The progress of development of the Group had been delayed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The report contained the draft terms of reference for Schools Forum to comment. The first meeting of the group was due to take place in November.

In response to a question about membership, Sal Thirlway stated that the schools federations would be asked to nominate representatives to the Group. To start with, the Group would be composed of the previous members of School Admissions Forum.

Schools Forum asked that the Group include in its membership a representative from special schools, in addition to the seven members proposed.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A special school representative would be included in the membership of the School Admissions Task and Finish Group.

11 GROWTH FUND STRATEGIC UPDATE

Piers Brunning, Strategy and Commissioning Places Specialist presented the Growth Fund Strategic Update report.

Some of the points made by Piers Brunning during his presentation are listed below:

- The Growth Fund related to the planning for education up to the age of 16;
- In planning the Growth Fund, the following factors were considered:
 - Changing local birth rates;
 - The impact of migration into the Borough (particularly into new homes);
 - The number of children moving across Borough boundaries for their education;
 - Independent education and home education were considered secondary factors.
- Although there was no statutory need to plan future school provision, there was a statutory requirement to ensure there were sufficient school places;
- Growth was expected around the strategic development locations;
- The Council had adopted strategies for school places for both primary and secondary school phases;
- The secondary strategy had identified two priorities:
 - A likely need for up to 100 additional Year 7 places from 2019/20

- Preparatory work for 270 permanent places after 2019/20 requirement
- The number of places which were required were impacted by cross borough movement;
- Demand for places in the Shinfield area had grown due to the housebuilding programme, the new Alder Grove CofE School was now open;
- Demand had also risen in Arborfield but with no need for extra capacity yet;
- No additional capacity was required in Woodley this year;
- In relation to the secondary allocation, the number of places on offer day differed from the number of places taken in September;
- Matthews Green and Arborfield Primary schools would require support from the Growth Fund in the near future;
- There was no expectation that a new secondary school would be required in the next decade. However, there may be a need to support Year 7 growth classes;
- The impact of the accelerated housebuilding in the Borough, in light of the National Planning Policy needed to be considered;
- It was the Council's intention to provide school places near to where children lived; in order to minimise traffic congestion, minimise Council home to school transport spend and maximise the achievement of parental preferences;
- Research suggested that if children lived within one mile of their school, they were more likely to walk to school, this changed dramatically if the distance was two miles or more.

During the discussion of the item following the comments were made:

- Shirley Austin stated that there were currently 135 places available in Year 7 at her school and questioned the numbers in relation to the likely need for additional places in Year 7 (on page 46 of the report);
- Piers Brunning stated that at the offer day all places were allocated, and capacity had been reached. He stated that the numbers had since fallen back and pointed out that the Forest School only offered places for boys. Shirley Austin stated Emmbrook and Waingels both had places for girls;
- Piers Brunning stated that Emmbrook and Waingels were the only schools in the Borough with surplus capacity (for boys and girls) this year;
- Paul Miller stated that the comment about additional places needed further clarification in the report;
- Corrina Gillard asked when Matthews Green Primary School was going to open. Piers Brunning stated that a decision had not yet been made, he agreed to keep schools informed on this; he anticipated that this would be in 2022;
- Paul Miller asked who made the decision of when to open the new school. Piers Brunning stated that this decision would be made by the Director in consultation with the Lead Member;
- Shirley Austin pointed out that since the Covid-19 pandemic, more students were cycling to school;
- Shirley Austin asked what was the percentage of pupils that went to independent schools and grammar schools, and how this impacted on the planning of school places in the Borough. She also asked for the data on the current numbers of pupils at all schools, in all year groups in the Borough.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and

2) Piers Brunning would provide a response to the questions raised at the meeting.

12 HIGH NEEDS BLOCK / SEND STRATEGY UPDATE

Sal Thirlway presented the High Needs Block/SEND Strategy Update report.

Some of the comments made by Sal Thirlway are listed below:

- The Task and Finish Group was very near to the conclusion of the final draft of the strategy. The strategy would then be sent out to consultation with key stakeholders and he anticipated that it would be ready for adoption in December;
- Data and performance reporting and intelligence was being improved;
- There had been an improvement in the timeliness and quality of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP);
- There had been a year on year increase in the number of EHCPs (21%), which was having a significant impact on the provision of SEND in the Borough;
- A lot of activity was now re-commencing after a period of re-deployment in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- It was hoped that Chiltern Way Academy Trust would become the new provider for Northern House;
- The increase in the number of EHCPs had impacted the HNB deficit and the need to use independent non-maintained provisions;
- The funding arrangements in the partnerships with Education, Health and Social Care were being reviewed to ensure efficiencies were being maximised;
- Since the last report to Forum, there had been a further deficit movement of £1m in the HNB.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Jay Blundell asked the following questions:
 - Firstly, about the Budget line relating to Foundry College which showed an additional £19k, she was not sure where this was coming from.
 - Secondly, about the Northern House Budget line which showed £720k for a provision that provided 67 places only (according to the catch up premium); the £720k was only part of the funding for Northern House. Last their year their funding exceeded £2.1m and she wanted to know where the rest of the funding was shown;
 - Thirdly, in relation to the Schools Block, the de-delegated Behaviour Support Services which showed a reduction of £22k due to the academisation of primary schools. She stated that this money should go back to primary schools and not to Foundry College, however it was reflected in the surplus/deficit line;
- Lynne Samuel stated that the £19k for Foundry College was in relation to an inflation uplift assumption, she offered to discuss this in more detail outside of the meeting;
- Lynn Samuel stated that the Northern House line was in relation to recoupment rate top up for HNB academies. In order to make it more transparent, Officers were asked to split the line to show each resource unit on an individual line;
- Lynne Samuel agreed to discuss with her colleagues about a better way to report the de-delegated fund, reflecting in-year changes;
- Jay Blundell asked who held the alternative education Budget of £100k. Lynne Samuel stated that this related to a number of small arrangements for EHCPs. Officers were asked to re-name that line to make it clearer;

- Ginny Rhodes requested an overview of how many EHCPs there were in each school year across the Borough, from pre-school to post-16; and where they were placed;
- Lynne Samuel stated that this information would be presented to the December meeting of Schools Forum;
- Ginny Rhodes stated that she had asked previously if every child in Year 6 had been placed into Year 7. She expressed frustration that St Crispin's had been asked to take three high needs children in the middle of the summer with no time for recruitment of staff;
- Sal Thirlway accepted that it was a challenging situation, it was important to identify the right provision for SEND children. He acknowledged that there were significant capacity issues in the Borough. However, the local authority was responding to the challenge;
- Members were concerned that the HNB issue had been ongoing for a long time, without improvement; despite many attempts from previous senior leaders;
- Shirley Austin pointed out that it would be more cost effective for the local authority to support local schools with top up arrangements than to have to pay for independent out of Borough placements;
- Sal Thirlway stated that a review of top up arrangements was part of the activity that was now re-commencing;
- Paul Miller expressed concern over the expenditure in the independent placements, which was the major cause of the HNB deficit;
- Sara Attra stated that there were not enough respite places in the Borough and she believed that Social Care and Health should contribute to the funding of these places; she believed that Schools Forum needed a better understanding of tri-partied funding.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

13 INSURANCE FOR MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Lynne Samuel presented the Insurance for Maintained Schools report.

Lynne Samuel stated that the report contained the update from the Task and Finish Group which had been set up as per Schools Forum request to look at insurance arrangements for maintained schools.

Lynne Samuel stated that due to technical issues, the final report had not been published in the agenda, she would circulate the completed report with the minutes.

Lynne Samuel stated that the Task and Finish Group had been gathering information about insurance experience from Wokingham and other local authority's maintained schools and academies, and also information about Risk Protection Arrangements (RPA).

The report provided the detail of the insurance cover offered by the Council. It was recognised that currently insurance could be purchased at a lower rate through RPA.

Lynne Samuel stated that it was proposed to remove insurance as a de-delegated offer from the 2021/22 financial year. In its place the Council would review the overall funding model and offer a revised arrangement to allow schools to purchase required cover directly through the Council's insurance team.

Lynne Samuel stated that an update report containing insurance options would be brought to the next meeting of Schools Forum.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The de-delegated insurance offer would be removed from the 2021/22 financial year;
- 2) Schools Forum would receive further updates on insurance options.

14 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Lynne Samuel presented the School Improvement Grant report.

Lynne Samuel stated that the report provided information about how the grant had been used.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

15 SCHOOLS FORUM MEMBERSHIP REVIEW 2020

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist presented the Schools Forum Membership Review 2020 report.

Luciane Bowker stated that the review contained an analysis of current number of pupils on roll and showed that some primary schools had converted to academies since the last review.

Luciane Bowker stated that as there had not been any significant changes, it was proposed that Schools Forum continue with its current membership structure.

Paul Miller stated that an annual review of the membership was required to ensure that Schools Forum continued to fairly represent schools in the Borough.

Paul Miller stated that the results of the self-assessment survey about Schools Forum had been very positive.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Schools Forum would continue with its current membership structure.

16 SCHOOLS FORUM FORWARD PLAN

This item was not discussed.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Request for disapplication

Katherine Vernon stated the Minimum Per Pupil Funding had been made compulsory in the funding formula for this financial year. This meant that primary schools had a protection of £4,180 per pupil, KS3 £5,215 per pupil and KS4 £5,715 per pupil.

The way the formula worked for all-through schools was that it calculated an average for all year groups, assuming that every year from reception to Year 11 had the same number of pupils. The rate for all-through schools was £4,695. In Wokingham's all through school, the numbers were not the same for all year groups, the Published Admission Number (PAN) for reception to Year 6 was 30 and the PAN for Year 7 to Year 11 was 203.

Therefore, according to this calculation this school was not going to receive the same level of funding as other secondary schools in the Borough.

Katherine Vernon stated that the local authority was seeking Schools Forum approval to submit a request for disapplication so that the school could receive the same level of funding as the other secondary schools in the Borough.

Upon being put to the vote, Schools Forum was in favour of supporting the request for disapplication.

RESOLVED That Schools Forum supports the request for disapplication to the DfE.

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 14 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Simon Weeks (Chairman), Chris Bowring (Vice-Chairman), Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Pauline Jorgensen, Abdul Loyes, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Jim Frewin

Officers Present

Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Strategic Development Locations, Planning Delivery
Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Rachel Lucas, Legal Advisor to the Committee

Case Officers Present

Adriana Gonzalez
Kayleigh Mansfield

27. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Carl Doran and Andrew Mickleburgh.

28. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

MEMBERS' UPDATE

There are a number of references to the Members' Update within these minutes. The Members' Update was circulated to all present at the meeting, and published on the WBC website. A copy is attached.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

31. APPLICATION NO.201337 - LAND AT PARKLANDS, BASINGSTOKE ROAD, THREE MILE CROSS

Proposal: Application for the approval of reserved matters pursuant to outline planning consent 171737 for the erection of 55 dwellings and all associated parking, landscape and access. Details of Layout, Appearance, Landscaping and Scale to be determined.

Applicant: Mr R Permain

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 15 to 42.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Complete amendment of the recommendation including conditions and informatives;
- Amendment of paragraph 84 to provide greater clarity;
- Amendment to the wording of paragraph 85.

Harry Glossop, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Harry stated that the concentration of the proposed affordable homes 35, 36, and 37, adjoining 3 existing dwellings, would result in an issue of overlooking and light pollution as the bedrooms of the existing and proposed dwellings would face each other. Harry stated that the concentration of properties in this specific area was unnecessary. Harry added that the concentration of homes in southern block would lead to a very crowded living situation for new and existing residents, resulting in the existing properties gaining 2 or 3 new neighbours which would feel unnecessarily crowded. Harry stated that it would be important that the houses within the southern area, within the proximity of existing dwellings, were limited in height as to not add to the issue of blocking natural light. Harry added the area north of the Brambles should have sufficient drainage in place, as an existing SUD was already in place and the area was already subject to flooding. The hill flowed northeast to southwest, and Harry had not seen any mitigation considerations regarding this particular issue.

Gillie York, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Gillie stated that she was the owner of Lieutenant Cottage, and her property would be surrounded by the new development. Gillie stated that the positioning of the SUD, in the context of the slope of the land going from the SANG down to Lieutenant Cottage. The field in front of the cottage already flooded in the winter, and the proposed drainage would be insufficient, whilst the SUD would continue to create additional problems. Gillie added that the soil was mainly clay based, and anything built on such land would raise the water table for all properties within the vicinity. As sewerage would be located towards the far north of the development, and it would be removed by direct flow rather than pumping, it would not be sufficient to accommodate the proposed new dwellings when sewerage problems were already present locally. Gillie stated that the access for the proposed development would be located on a road with a seemingly minimum speed of 40Mph rather than a maximum speed of 40Mph. Gillie added that traffic calming had been promised for some time now to reduce the speed limit on the road to 30Mph, however this had yet to be implemented. Gillie queried where the storage of building and construction materials would be located, as to not disrupt the lives of existing local residents.

Nick Paterson-Neild, agent, spoke in support of the application. Nick stated that the outline planning permission was granted for this development in February 2019, including the principle of development, access, and development of a SANG. Nick added that the application in front of Members was to consider issues such as the layout and design of the development. Nick stated that the development would be located next to planned improvements, and would be ideally positioned to support housing need within the Borough. Nick stated that the proposals would be of high quality design and would fit in with the character of the surrounding area. Nick added that the development would provide a mixture of housing including 19 affordable properties. The centrepiece of the development would be the SANG, which would serve existing and proposed properties and residents. Nick stated that the SANG had 10 visitor spaces associated with it. The development would increase biodiversity gains within the area via the provision of additional landscaping features. All properties would have access to an active electric vehicle charging point, one bed units would have access to one parking space, two and three bed units would have access to at least 2 parking spaces, and four bed units would

have access to 3 car parking spaces. Nick concluded that the development would be of high quality, and conformed to all standards.

Jim Frewin, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Jim stated that this would be a further area of green land within the Shinfield area that was allowed to be developed via an appeal. Jim asked that Committee Members consider whether an adequate level of amenity space was good enough for Borough residents. Jim added that the development would add further traffic to an already congested area, and the approved access would require vehicles to cross a 40Mph road. Jim queried which conditions would mitigate the safety issues concerning access to the site. Jim queried what mitigations would be put in place regarding sewerage and surface water flooding, to ensure that the development would not add to these existing issues. Jim stated that 68 mature trees would be removed as part of the proposals during a time of climate emergency. Jim was of the opinion that there was not a good record of delivering replacement trees within the Borough, and sought assurances that replacement trees would be cared for and replaced if necessary. Jim queried what safeguards would be put in place regarding AWE emergency zone.

Simon Weeks noted a variety of points raised by public speakers, and asked the appropriate officers for clarification. Firstly, were the distances related to proposed properties 35, 36, and 37 and existing dwellings policy compliant. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Strategic Development Locations and Planning Delivery, stated that the proposals were policy compliant, with a 22m back to back separation distance. From a planning point of view, the number of units in an area was not relevant if all units met the appropriate standards. The standards accounted for privacy concerns, and the proposals were bedroom to bedroom rather than a lounge to bedroom situation, which would be more intrusive relationship.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding the sloping of the development, and associated levels of the proposed dwellings. Connor Corrigan stated that there was an approximate 2m level differential between the Brambles and the proposed development site, which reduced to 0.5m as you moved across the site. This difference in levels was considered as part of the application and was deemed acceptable.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding the concern raised related to lighting and the effects thereof on existing dwellings. Connor Corrigan stated that if there was a perceived issue for existing dwellings then shielding could be placed around the lighting during the detail stage of the application. In response to this, Simon Weeks suggested that an informative be included to seek appropriate shielding should the Committee be minded to approve the application.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding the concerns raised related to flooding issues. Connor Corrigan stated that Taylor Wimpey had a scheme in place to improve drainage in the area, and this would be an improvement on the existing drainage solution in the area. Connor added that officers and the applicant were aware of issues related to flooding, and the application would seek to improve these issues. Simon Weeks queried whether sewage concerns had been considered. Connor Corrigan confirmed that Thames Water had not raised an objection to the development. Simon Weeks commented that it was important to note a distinction between no objection being raised, and Thames Water being happy that there was capacity to accommodate a new development within their existing sewage network.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding the speed calming measures which had been delayed. Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager, stated that the developer had a scheme to enable traffic calming measures on the Basingstoke Road, and the plans were progressing nicely until the Covid-19 pandemic had begun. The scheme had subsequently been delayed but not lost, and officers would press the developer for an update regarding the scheme.

Simon Weeks commented that the use of the word adequate, relating to amenity provision, also made him uneasy. However, the scheme was scheduled to be delivered over two years and therefore 55 units would not be delivered immediately.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding the concern raised about the AWE emergency zone, and whether the standards present at the time of outline approval had to be applied. Connor Corrigan stated that if this was a new application, the new standards would be considered. However, as this was a reserved matters application the standards present at the time of the outline approval were applied. As such, the development could be accommodated within the existing AWE plan.

Pauline Jorgensen queried why the roads were not proposed to be adopted by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), and whether the Juliet balconies would cause any overlooking. Judy Kelly stated that the developer was under no obligation to offer the roads to WBC, and in this case the street lighting was different to standard due to ecology reasons. In addition, there was a combined drainage solution which was different to standard. The roads would be maintained at adoptable levels, and this was secured by condition. Connor Corrigan stated that the Juliet balconies would be facing the SANG, and there was therefore no issues relating to overlooking.

Abdul Loyes queried whether the site was an allocated development site, and whether any part of the site was located within the green belt. Connor Corrigan stated that the site was located within the wider SDL area, however it was not an allocated site. The principle of development was established at appeal, and the site was not located within the green belt.

Malcolm Richards queried the road widths, both at the entrances to the site and throughout the site, queried whether each unit would have access to off street parking and thereby confirming to Borough standards, and queried whether the walking route to a local school would be illuminated by street lighting. Judy Kelly stated that the road widths were guided by a swept path analysis, and the widths varied based on vehicles passing refuse vehicles. Each unit would have access to off street parking and the development accorded with Borough parking standards. Kayleigh Mansfield, case officer, clarified that the highways would be illuminated, however the public right of way would not be illuminated which was a common scenario, for example due to ecology reasons.

Angus Ross queried whether the open space and SANG would be adopted, and where off site visitors could park should they wish to visit the SANG. Judy Kelly stated that the site was required to provide 17 visitor/unallocated spaces, and it was proposed to provide 23 with a net surplus of 5 spaces. Judy added that the parking management strategy would likely address the issue of people visiting the SANG. Connor Corrigan stated that the SANG would be handed over to WBC for management, and access had been secured to the public despite some private roads in the vicinity.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried the size of trees due to be planted on the site, as other sites had experienced the loss of newly planted trees. Connor Corrigan stated that he

expected the trees to be of a fairly substantial size as they would mostly be planted within the SANG. Connor added that any trees planted would be subject to a five year maintenance and replacement condition.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that there had been overdevelopment in the area and additional development such as this application, the principle of which was allowed at appeal, treated WBC policies with disdain. Gary Cowan asked that officers provide carbon offsetting calculations for future applications proposing to remove mature trees and replace with smaller specimens. Simon Weeks commented that national and local planning policy was silent on issues such as electric vehicle charging, and this development proposed to provide an active electric vehicle charging point for all units which was a move in the right direction.

Rachel Lucas, Legal Advisor to the Committee, advised that the Constitution stated that Members should hear all discussion on a Planning application in order to be in a position to vote. Angus Ross had previously commented that he had not heard part of the Agent's statement. Angus Ross stated that he would therefore abstain from the subsequent voting.

Simon Weeks proposed that an informative be added, asking that street lighting be shielded as to not be intrusive to properties both within the development site and outside of the development site. This informative was unanimously agreed and added to the list of informatives.

Simon Weeks proposed that an informative be added, asking that the speed of delivery of traffic calming measures on the Basingstoke Road be expedited, to ensure that sufficient measures were implemented at the earliest opportunity. This informative was unanimously agreed and added to the list of informatives.

Stephen Conway proposed that an informative be added, requesting that Thames Water address existing foul water issues prior to the proposed dwellings being made available for sale. This informative was unanimously agreed and added to the list of informatives.

Chris Bowring sought clarification that drainage could be considered, as this was a part of the outline application. Connor Corrigan stated that there was not an issue with considering drainage issues in this instance.

RESOLVED That application number 201337 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out within the Members' Update, and three additional informatives related to light shielding, traffic calming delivery, and foul water removal as resolved by the Committee.

32. APPLICATION NO.202270 - 12 RECTORY ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40 1DH

Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use from dwellinghouse (C3) to non-residential institution (F1). Erection of two single storey extensions to the south-west and north-west of the property, and demolition of the existing garage.

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 53 to 78.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included an amendment to condition 9.

Adam Davies, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Adam stated that last year it became apparent that the existing contact resource centre would be located within a new road system, and therefore the centre needed to move locations. Adam added that the contact centre formed a central part of the care plan in place for these children, and the contact was facilitated by supervisors. Some contact could be challenging, and it was essential that children enjoyed a positive experience within a safe and homely environment. The proposed location was ideal due to a good level of privacy, in a quiet setting. Adam stated that the centre would operate between 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday, with the busier times being after school. It was not intended to operate the facility at the weekends, and 4 contacts could be made at any one time. Adam added that the facility would include a reception and kitchen area, in addition to private rooms for contact to take place.

Malcolm Richards queried where parents would park when they had an appointment to have a contact session, asked whether sprinklers should be included in the plans if the facility was akin to an educational facility, queried whether any residential management staff would be present within the facility overnight, and asked whether it was possible to retain any of the trees on site that were proposed to be felled. Adam Davies clarified that children could be dropped off between 9am and 6pm by a carer, and parents would be expected to park locally and walk to the facility. Adam added that the facility was not an educational resource, and operational management would be present on site however not overnight. Adriana Gonzalez, case officer, stated that there were no trees of importance or quality on site, and a suitable landscaping condition was in place to ensure replacement planting, especially in the context of the nearby conservation area. Adriana confirmed that the facility was not considered as an educational facility.

Angus Ross queried whether there was any potential harm to the property north of the proposed development site in terms of overlooking or separation distances. Adriana Gonzalez stated that separation distances between the proposed extension and the existing dwelling conformed to standards, and obscure glazing would be implemented to retain privacy.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey proposed an informative, asking that sprinkler provision be accommodated during other construction works on the building. This informative was unanimously agreed and added to the list of informatives.

Gary Cowan queried whether a ground penetration radar survey could be carried out, as had been requested for a recent application involving a mature tree. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Strategic Development Locations and Planning Delivery, stated that a ground penetration radar survey was only carried out when the tree in question was a very significant tree. Connor added that there were not category A or B trees on site, parking could be accommodated without harming the trees, and only the extension could impact on the roots of the tree however this was unlikely to have much of an impact. Gary added that he was happy if officers were confident that the roots would be protected, as the tree had a positive impact on the street scene.

Simon Weeks commented that the proposed location was away from noise and excess traffic, and would provide a calm environment for children to receive contact sessions.

The proposed new location was better than the current facility's location by a busy junction, as it was located back from the road, and associated traffic noise and pollution.

RESOLVED That application number 202270 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 54 to 56, amended condition 9 as set out in the Members' Update, and additional informative regarding sprinkler provision as resolved by the Committee.

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Decision made in the presence of:
 Susan Bentley, Public Health and Leisure Business Manager
 Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
 Joseph Howorth, Sport Development Officer

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION RECORD SHEET IMD 2020/14
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Title of the report	Sport and Leisure Fees and Charges
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Parry Batth
ACTION BY Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
DECISION MADE ON 15 October 2020

Recommendation contained in the report

That the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure agree to the additional events and charges as detailed within the report.

Decision

That the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure agreed to the additional events and charges as detailed within the report.

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comments
Monitoring Officer	No comments
Leader of the Council	No comments

Reasons why the report was deemed to have contained confidential or Exempt information (if applicable)

N/A

Any Conflict of interest declared by any Executive Member who is consulted by a Member which relates to the decision

None

Any dispensation granted by the Head of Paid Service in respect of any declared conflict of interest

None

Background papers

Executive report detailing event and pricing information

PUBLISHED ON: 15 October 2020

EFFECTIVE ON: 23 October 2020

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 22 October 2020

Decision made in the presence of:
 Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
 Nicky Thomas, Senior Specialist – Assessments

**INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER
 DECISION RECORD SHEET
 IMD 2020/15**

Title of the report	Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Scheme
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DECISION MADE BY Executive - Individual Member Decisions

Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser

ACTION BY Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

DECISION MADE ON 20 October 2020

Recommendation contained in the report

That the Executive Member for Housing and Finance approve the policy as contained within Annex A to the report. This policy may need to be changed and a further "Urgent Item" may be required at a later date. Currently this scheme will operate from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021.

Decision

That the Executive Member for Housing and Finance approves the policy as contained within Annex A to the report. This policy may need to be changed and a further "Urgent Item" may be required at a later date. Currently this scheme will operate from 28th September 2020 to 31st January 2021

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	Director and Assistant Director have reviewed policy and had the opportunity to comment on.
Monitoring Officer	Notified and nothing specific to add
Leader of the Council	Notified and nothing specific to add

Reasons why the report was deemed to have contained confidential or Exempt information (if applicable)

None

Any Conflict of interest declared by any Executive Member who is consulted by a Member which relates to the decision

None

Any dispensation granted by the Head of Paid Service in respect of any declared conflict of interest

N/A

Background papers

Discretionary Test & Trace Support Payments Policy

PUBLISHED ON: 20 October 2020

EFFECTIVE ON: 29 October 2020

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 28 October 2020

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.40 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Jenny Cheng, Andy Croy, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Emma Hobbs, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Ken Miall, Andrew Mickleburgh and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: John Halsall

Officers Present

Laura Callan, Strategy and Planning Manager, Insight and Change
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Susan Parsonage, Chief Executive
Meradin Peachey, Public Health Consultant
Simon Price, Assistant Director, Housing, Income and Assessment
Sally Watkins, Assistant Director, Digital and Change

40. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

41. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

42. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were submitted from:

- Andy Croy – volunteered at the Wokingham Foodbank and the Woodley Lunch Bunch and his mother volunteered at Citizens Advice;
- Paul Fishwick – received a business grant as a Director of a small business and his wife volunteered at the Community Hub;
- Jim Frewin – volunteered to supply food for the maternity unit at the RBH;
- Guy Grandison – volunteered to produce PPE for distribution to charities and the NHS;
- Emma Hobbs – volunteered at the Community Hub and was a trustee of Citizens Advice;
- Sarah Kerr – volunteered at the Community Hub;
- Andrew Mickleburgh – volunteered at the Community Hub;
- Alison Swaddle – volunteered at the Community Hub.

The Chairman thanked Members for their efforts in contributing to the community response to the pandemic.

43. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

44. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

45. UPDATE ON COVID-19: CORPORATE RECOVERY/RESIDENT SURVEY/TEST & TRACE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 13 to 24, which provided an update on the Council's Covid-19 recovery activity. The report also gave details of the feedback provided by a Residents' Survey and outlined progress relating to Test and Trace and the Borough's Outbreak Management Plan.

Susan Parsonage (Chief Executive), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director, Digital and Change) and Meradin Peachey (Public Health Consultant) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Council's Covid-19 recovery activity was a co-ordinated programme of work which supported Council services and the community in reconstruction of economic infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social and physical wellbeing for residents across the Borough. In addition, the process had identified strategic opportunities which went beyond traditional ways of working, aiming to achieve longer term benefits for the community.

The Corporate Recovery Programme (CRP) was initiated by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) in May 2020. The programme aimed to address four key themes:

- Impact – to ensure that WBC understood the impact of Covid-19 on the community and the Council (services, staff, budgets);
- Options – to identify options to harness the innovation which arose during the initial response phase;
- Co-ordination – co-ordinating services and the community in the reconstruction of economic infrastructure and restoration of emotional and physical wellbeing;
- Restoration – establishing a framework of support for businesses and any affected areas in the Borough.

The CRP initially comprised ten workstreams which aligned with individual service recovery activity, with CLT having overall responsibility for the Recovery Co-ordinating Group. The ten workstreams included community engagement, community wellbeing, test and trace, communications, business and economy, staff and accommodation and contracts and finance. By working alongside partners such as Town and Parish Councils, the voluntary sector and other community groups, the Council was able to ensure a community voice in the recovery planning process.

In order to assess the impact of Covid-19 on residents, businesses, partners and WBC staff, the Council undertook several engagement activities including an online residents' survey, a workshop for internal and external partners and interviews to develop deeper insights on service delivery.

The residents' survey garnered 1,477 responses and produced the following headline messages:

- 67% satisfaction with the Council's overall response to the pandemic;
- Ability to connect with family, friends and community, stress and anxiety and diet/eating habits were the top three issues residents struggled with during the lockdown period;

- Supporting local businesses/employment, mental health and reducing social isolation and loneliness in vulnerable people were seen as the biggest future priorities for the Council;
- The biggest positive impacts of Covid-19 were the environmental impact, time spent indoors, sense of community and willingness to help each other, time spent with immediate family and work-life balance.

The report stated that Test and Trace at the local level had two main components – outbreak management and case tracing. These areas, led by the local Public Health team, connected to the national response to Covid-19. Governance of Outbreak Management consisted of:

- Gold Command – comprising CLT and Public Health;
- The Local Outbreak Engagement Board (LOEB) chaired by the Council Leader;
- The Outbreak Management Group – led by WBC Public Health and including WBC Assistant Directors;
- The Incident Control Team – led by Public Health England – attended by local Public Health Teams and WBC senior managers.

The report gave details of the recent launch of local contact tracing which aimed to supplement the NHS Test and Trace system. Where contact could not be made through the national system, resident data was provided to the Council. The Council would then use local intelligence to contact those residents with positive test results. A team of contact tracers had been developed. The team could be flexed as required, depending on the number of positive cases in the Borough.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

In relation to communications around the new QR codes made available for hospitality and leisure, why was there a delay in the Council's press release? Sally Watkins undertook to check on the initial communications and provide feedback.

WBC Case Tracing – what were the resource implications and which services would be impacted by the redeployment of staff? Sally Watkins stated that the Council had sought volunteers to carry out this work. The Council's involvement had commenced on 13 October 2020. Modelling had been carried out in order to assess the resource implications based on 50 cases per day, up to 400 cases per day. As redeployment happened an assessment would be made on which services to pause. In the meantime, the Council was seeking to take advantage of the Kick Start scheme in order to bring in additional resources.

In relation to the Residents' Survey – what was the intention, what was the Council's response to the feedback provided and were there plans to carry out further surveys? Sally Watkins commented that the survey had provided useful information on the impact of the pandemic on residents and their concerns and challenges for the future. At the moment there was no specific date for a follow-up survey. A more targeted follow-up, for example in relation to mental health, would provide useful information. Mental health was an issue of specific focus for the Council.

A key issue was the impact of the pandemic on Council staff in relation to fatigue, stress and mental health. Susan Parsonage stated that the wellbeing of staff was very important. Support measures were in place for staff working remotely and managers were looking out

for signs of stress and burn-out. The absence of face-to-face meetings added a new range of issues to be monitored and managed.

What was the impact of the Berkshire Recovery Group? Sally Watkins stated that the group had been initiated through the Berkshire Chief Executives' group. The aim was to share learning and work together where possible, for example by working with the Local Enterprise Partnership to address the needs of business and make contact with hard to reach companies and local businesses.

The number of Covid-19 cases in the Borough was increasing towards the threshold for Tier 2 restrictions. How confident was the Council that it could avoid moving through Tier 2 into Tier 3? Meradin Peachey confirmed that infection rates were increasing in the Borough (currently 77 per 100,000). To date the Council and partners had been very effective at managing outbreak, so there was some confidence that Tier 3 could be avoided. Susan Parsonage commented that the Borough's residents had, to date, been largely compliant with the Government guidelines. The Council was working hard to develop better data and local intelligence about the potential sources of community transmission of the virus. This data would help to shape the Council's future actions and help to keep infection rates as low as possible.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Susan Parsonage, Meradin Peachey and Sally Watkins be thanked for attending the meeting to provide the update on current activity relating to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- 2) the updates on corporate recovery, residents' survey and test and trace be noted;
- 3) the Committee receive further updates on the latest developments relating to the Covid-19 pandemic at future meetings.

46. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PEOPLE WITH LOW INCOME THE UNEMPLOYED AND THE HOMELESS

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 25 to 200, which gave details of the impact of Covid-19 on poverty in the Borough, specifically individuals and families with low incomes, unemployment and homelessness.

Laura Callan (Strategy and Planning Manager, Insight and Change) attended the meeting to introduce the report. Also in attendance were Simon Price (Assistant Director, Housing, Income and Assessments), Emma Cantrell (First Days Children's Charity), Annette Medhurst (Wokingham Foodbank) and Jake Morrison (Citizens Advice Wokingham).

The report stated that, whilst the Borough had consistently been one of the least deprived unitary authorities in England, there were individuals and families living on low incomes and there were challenges to ensure that opportunities were available for every resident. The End Child Poverty report indicated that, after housing costs, 17% of children in the Borough were living in poverty.

The Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact with the shut-down of large sections of the economy. The impacts included:

- A 223% increase in claims for out of work benefits between February and August 2020;
- Furloughing of 21,700 people in the Borough as at August 2020;
- A disproportionate impact on workers from the BAME community, women, young workers, low paid and disabled workers;
- 120 young people at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET), significantly up on previous years;
- Increase in demand for support from Citizens Advice;
- 220% increase in people accessing the Wokingham Foodbank during March-August 2020, compared to 2019;
- 479% increase in children eligible for free school meals between March-August 2020, compared to 2019.

The report stated that the Council had worked with partners to deliver a number of interventions, including:

- Operation of the Citizens Advice “One Front Door”;
- The “All In” policy which supported rough sleepers into accommodation;
- Financial support to providers in the community and voluntary sector;
- Flexible repayment plans for Council Tax and the Council Tax Hardship Fund;
- Support to residents through the Community Engagement Team;
- Support for Council tenants delivered by the Tenancy Sustainment Team.

The report stated that, whilst there were a number of intervention points available to the Council, not all issues could be resolved locally. In some instances, the Council was restricted by Government policy or may not be best placed to deliver the appropriate solution. The Council would continue to monitor data and local intelligence, working with partners to understand and need and to establish the most effective intervention points to support individuals and families.

In the ensuing discussion Members and guests raised the following points:

It was important to use language carefully when talking about poverty. The Borough was frequently referred to as being one of the healthiest and wealthiest in the country. However, as the report indicated, there were over 7,000 children living in relative poverty.

Jake Morrison stated that Citizens Advice Wokingham were working on a report for the Borough, Town and Parish Councils which would give details of deprivation levels, broken down into local areas. Citizens Advice was also running national campaigns relating to fair and safe employment and improvements to Universal Credit. Jake commented that joint working through the pandemic had taken partnerships to a new level. Citizens Advice were providing training for front-line WBC staff on issues such as mental health. Any support from Members relating to the Citizens Advice national campaigns would be welcome.

Emma Cantrell stated that First Days was keen to work in partnership with the Council and other stakeholders. Effective partnership working was not always about funding. Working together may drive innovation which could actually make services more targeted and efficient, thereby save money. Emma agreed that the co-production of an anti-poverty strategy would be a positive step forwards.

Annette Medhurst stated that, although the number of people accessing the Wokingham Foodbank had returned close to pre-pandemic levels, there was likely to be an increase as

Government support reduced and unemployment increased in the Borough. Annette was now in a regular dialogue with senior leaders at the Council which was a positive development.

Andy Croy raised the issue of care leavers who, currently, were required to pay Council Tax between the ages of 21 to 25. Andy referred to a discussion at the recent Corporate Parenting Board meeting and suggested that the Committee may wish to consider making a recommendation to the Executive on this issue. Susan Parsonage commented that this issue should be considered as part of the Budget process as there were already overspends within Children's Services budgets.

What was the local impact of the pandemic on poverty levels in the BAME community? Jake Morrison commented that there had been a positive response to the BAME community, helped by the One Front Door approach. This had been supported by the Council's regular communications. Citizens Advice were aiming to work with specific groups within the BAME community to improve awareness and understanding of support available locally. The stated aim of developing greater local intelligence would support this process. The Council's community engagement officers were also working in local communities to support individuals and families.

Was there a link between zero-hours contracts and poverty? Laura Callan commented that insecure employment did have an impact as people may not be able to work enough hours each week to earn enough to take them out of poverty.

As a result of the pandemic, were local schools able to provide hot lunches for their pupils? Laura Callan commented that the Council did monitor the contract with local schools. Whilst, initially, a number of schools had moved to packed lunches, there was a movement back to the provision of hot meals. Further information on this point could be shared with Members.

In conclusion, Susan Parsonage stated that the Council was committed to working in partnership. The discussion tonight had highlighted the importance of more detailed local intelligence and insight. The Council wanted to work with key stakeholders to understand the experience of individuals and families in the Borough. Improved knowledge about local needs would inform the Council's strategic direction for example through the co-production of an anti-poverty strategy. As the discussion illustrated, effective partnership working was not necessarily about funding. It was about working together to develop new ideas and new opportunities which may actually save money in the long run. Covid-19 had led to a greater focus on the impact of the pandemic on the poorest members of the community. However, the Council was committed to working in partnership to tackle this issue, regardless of the pandemic.

Following the discussion, the Committee considered appropriate recommendations to the Executive, as follows:

It was moved by Andrew Mickleburgh and seconded by Sarah Kerr that:

“the Executive, in view of the multi-dimensional nature of “poverty”, in all discussions, data, policy and action, focus on all who are suffering different types of rising and significant levels of hardship.”

On being put to the vote the proposal was **agreed**.

It was moved by Andy Croy and seconded by Sarah Kerr that:

“the Executive urgently re-examine the issue of 21 to 25 year old care leavers paying Council Tax, for the remainder of this financial year.”

On being put to the vote the proposal was **agreed**.

It was moved by Andy Croy and seconded by Sarah Kerr that:

“The Executive instruct Officers to urgently engage with poverty facing charities to formalise 1) communications and 2) support offered by Wokingham Borough Council to these charities”.

On being put to the vote the proposal was **not agreed**.

It was proposed by Sarah Kerr and seconded by Paul Fishwick that:

“This Committee recommend to the Executive that this Council will co-produce an anti-poverty strategy;

On being put to the vote the proposal was **agreed**.

It was proposed by Sarah Kerr and seconded by Pauline Helliar-Symons that:

“this Committee recommend to the Executive that this Council will limit the use of comparative data and benchmarking narrative, such as being ranked the least deprived upper tier authority, when talking about poverty, except when making specific reference to reduction in poverty.”

On being put to the vote the proposal was **agreed**.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Laura Callan, Simon Price, Emma Cantrell, Annette Medhurst and Jake Morrison be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) the Committee recommend to the Executive that the Council, in view of the multi-dimensional nature of “poverty”, in all discussions, data, policy and action, focus on all who are suffering different types of rising and significant levels of hardship;
- 3) the Committee recommend to the Executive that it urgently re-examines the issue of 21 to 25 year old care leavers paying Council Tax, for the remainder of this financial year;
- 4) the Committee recommend to the Executive that this Council will co-produce an anti-poverty strategy;
- 5) the Committee recommend to the Executive that this Council will limit the use of comparative data and benchmarking narrative, such as being ranked the least deprived upper tier authority, when talking about poverty, except when making specific reference to reduction in poverty.

47. SCRUTINY OF WBC RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 201 to 234, which provided an update on the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report stated that, at its meeting on 24 June 2020, the Committee had considered a report on the Council's initial response to the pandemic. The Committee asked each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to look at key themes relating to the Council's response and to report back on their findings. The key themes were:

- Care homes;
- Effectiveness of health partnerships;
- Schools and Children's Services;
- Impact on mental health;
- Finance and business;
- Community response;
- Community safety/localities;
- Communication and engagement;
- Recovery;
- Test and Trace;
- Poverty – impact on the poorest, the unemployed and the homeless;
- Maintaining democracy.

Appended to the report were copies of minutes and briefings from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees which provided evidence of the issues considered and the findings to date.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

In relation to the transmission of the virus between young people (18 to 35) and the over-60s, what could the Council do to increase awareness and support appropriate behaviours? Meradin Peachy commented that work was ongoing to understand the perspective of young people and any factors which prevented adherence to the guidelines. This was especially important for young people in the care system. A lot of work had been done in relation to vulnerable children in local schools. Another issue was the risks relating to university students, especially those who worked in or visited care homes. This should be factored in to the risk assessments carried out by care homes.

The Chairman confirmed that the intention was to bring the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees together in a report to the Executive. A draft of the report would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee on 25 November 2020 for consideration.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the progress reported by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in scrutinising the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic be noted;
- 2) the Committee consider a draft report on the Scrutiny review of the Council's response to the pandemic at its meeting on 25 November 2020;

- 3) the Committee recommend to the Executive that local care homes be advised to review risk assessments and ensure appropriate social distancing for young people who work in or visit their homes;
- 4) the Committee's report to the Executive highlight the importance of supporting all aspects of WBC staff welfare as the Council enters into the next phase of the pandemic;
- 5) the Committee's report to the Executive highlight the relative sparsity of data on domestic violence and abuse and emphasise the need for explicit recognition and action;
- 6) the Chairman write to the Chief Executive to request that Council staff be thanked for their outstanding efforts in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside the outstanding work of community volunteers;
- 7) Members receive an updated Council organogram setting out the roles of Officers (down to 3rd tier), including any changes relating to the pandemic.

48. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE AND IEMD FORWARD PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Executive Member Decision Forward Programme, as set out on Agenda pages 235 to 240.

RESOLVED: That the Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programmes be noted.

49. O&S COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward Work Programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 241 to 252.

During the discussion, Members raised the following points:

- Sarah Kerr requested that an item on the development of the proposed co-produced anti-poverty strategy be added to the Work Programme to ensure O&S input into the process;
- Sarah Kerr suggested that the Committee consider adding an item on effective partnership working with charities and other organisations tackling poverty at the meeting on 25 November 2020;
- Sarah Kerr suggested that the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider adding an item on the impact of inequality on children and measures to address it at its meeting on 5 November 2020;
- Ken Miall confirmed that Health Overview and Scrutiny items relating to ambulance response times, self-harm and suicide prevention would be timetabled for a meeting of the Committee;
- Guy Grandison confirmed that the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering the first tranche of growth bids as part of the

development of the Council's 2021/22 Revenue Budget, at its meeting on 28 October 2020. Further growth bids would be considered at the meeting on 23 November 2020.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes be noted;
- 2) an item on the development of the proposed co-produced anti-poverty strategy be added to the O&S Management Committee Work Programme to ensure O&S input into the process;
- 3) the Committee consider adding an item on effective partnership working with charities and other organisations tackling poverty, at the meeting on 25 November 2020;
- 4) the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider adding an item on the impact of inequality on children and measures to address it, at its meeting on 5 November 2020.

Decision made in the presence of:
 Ian Bellinger, Category Manager - Growth and Delivery
 Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

**INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER
 DECISION RECORD SHEET
 IMD 2020/13**

Title of the report	Planning for the Future White Paper Consultation
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith
ACTION BY Director, Place and Growth - Chris Traill
DECISION MADE ON 27 October 2020

Recommendation contained in the report

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Enclosure 1 as this council's response to the government consultation 'Planning for the Future' white paper (MHCLG, August 2020).

Decision

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agreed that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Enclosure 1 of the agenda report as this council's response to the Government consultation 'Planning for the Future' white paper (MHCLG, August 2020).

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comments.
Monitoring Officer	No comments.
Leader of the Council	Minor comments received and incorporated into the recommended response.

Reasons why the report was deemed to have contained confidential or Exempt information (if applicable)

N/A

Any Conflict of interest declared by any Executive Member who is consulted by a Member which relates to the decision

None

Any dispensation granted by the Head of Paid Service in respect of any declared conflict of interest

None

Background papers

IEMD Report

Enclosure outlining recommended response

PUBLISHED ON: 27 October 2020

EFFECTIVE ON: 4 November 2020

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 3 November 2020

**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 Helliard-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.