

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.55 PM

Members Present

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

81. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Pauline Jorgensen and Oliver Whittle.

82. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Mayor at a future opportunity.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

84. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed Members that he had attended a number of virtual meetings in his role as Mayor.

85. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

85.1 Anne Chadwick asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question. Due to her inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question

Could you give an update about the Edge of Care services please?

Answer

Edge of care work in Wokingham is undertaken by the Compass Team. This team is new and commenced in June 2020. The team consist of a Team manager, 3 child and family workers and a psychologist. The team are currently working with 16 children.

The team work with:

- Children who are in the care of their families where there is a risk of them becoming looked after.
- Children in care to prevent placement breakdown and maintain placement stability.
- Children who are in care to support their reunification home.

The Compass Team uses both Trauma Informed and Systemic Practice to underpin their interventions.

An example of their work includes co working to prevent family breakdown, this involved the Psychologist completing work with parents and a Child and Family Worker completing direct work separately with the child.

Early indications are that the work of the team is making a difference and has led to positive outcomes for children. This includes supporting several children remain in the care of their parents and not become looked after. They have also supported several children to return home from costly residential placements. They have supported 2 children to remain with foster carers, where the placement was vulnerable to breakdown, preventing a placement move and the need to move to a residential resource.

Families who have finished working with members of the Compass Team have fed back improvements in their ability to communicate with their children, and an improvement in the behaviour and confidence of the child. They have also noted improvements in relation to their own parenting and feeling that they have a range of strategies to try when they run into 'bumps along the road'.

85.2 Jackie Rance asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Would the Executive Member for Children's Services give an update on Wokingham Borough Council's use of the Winter Fund to help local families in these difficult times? I'm aware as I have been supporting parents in Shinfield South and know what a difference it has made to individuals. Please give an update on the delivery of the Winter Fund.

Answer:

As of 8th January, this year, we have received 53 referrals for support from the Covid Winter Grant Fund via the Coronavirus Community Response One Front Door and we have so far distributed £21,000 to families with or without children who are struggling with the costs of food or fuel.

In addition, the families of all pupils in receipt of benefits related Free School Meals have been provided with food vouchers to cover the Christmas holiday, and will be provided with vouchers to cover the leave in February.

We have also supported 75 Care Leavers to meet the cost of food and groceries.

The grant is available until 31st March and I would like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone or anyone who is struggling to meet the costs of fuel or food over these incredibly difficult winter months to apply for support through the grant.

Supplementary Question:

How much of the grant remains available for families with or without children?

Supplementary Answer:

As of 8th January, I do not have a later figure I am afraid, £80,000 remains.

85.3 Philip Cunnington asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question:

I am very aware of the effect on the mental health and wellbeing of friends and neighbours in Norreys and across the Borough as a result of restrictions enforced during the Covid 19 pandemic. In addition, the effect on mental health due to traumatic experiences of those who have suffered illness, bereavement, loss of employment or financial hardship as a direct result of the pandemic. Can you advise me of any plans you have made to deal with this?

Answer:

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a real impact on people's mental health. The Borough's Community Response has tried to reach out to those isolated and vulnerable. Adult Social Care within WBC has made over 6,000 initial welfare checks with some 16,000 follow up welfare calls via the WBC / The Link Visiting Scheme and there have been some 4,000 calls to the "One Front Door", supported by WBC and Citizens Advice. The One Front Door takes calls of any nature, many of which relate lately to mental health. These initiatives will continue to be in place over the next period.

We also have further initiatives we are doing. Firstly, we are doing a project with Earley Plus, PCN and Citizens Advice to encourage residents to call the One Front Door, if their mental health is suffering. The CAB will try to resolve some of the underlying issues causing depression and anxiety, such as financial stress and relationship breakdowns. They also can sign post to other specialist services, be it formal mental health services or other voluntary organisations.

In addition, WBC have sourced a specialist voluntary sector partner, Oxfordshire MIND, to provide support to those suffering from mild to moderate mental health issues. This service includes Well Being Support Workers, who will talk through issues over a number of sessions, as well as signposting to groups and activities to support them. The service 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. This will be in place in the next couple of months and will be based in Wokingham town centre as well as remotely across the Borough.

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 staying well. Courses provide life skill training and access to support to gain employment. They are open to all Wokingham Borough residents over the age of 18 who are free to register with the college. The courses are currently delivered online until venues can reopen in the community post Covid.

Supplementary Question:

You mentioned the upcoming service with MIND. Can you give me some examples of how successful they have been in this sort of situation in other areas, and how they can achieve it in Wokingham?

Supplementary Answer:

They have a proven track record of implementing large, broad reaching mental health programmes. They currently hold the contract for the delivery of the Primary Care

wellbeing project, which has been commissioned by the Oxfordshire CCG, and delivery of Oxfordshire Safe Haven, the out of hours service commissioned by the Oxfordshire NHS Foundation Trust. Since 2018 when their primary care wellbeing project was commissioned, they have seen 3,100 people across 32 GP practices. In Year 2, they saw 1,500 people across 29 GP practices. Of this number, 185 completed the intervention, leaving the service successfully. 78% reported a significant increase in wellbeing. Satisfaction rates have remained above 90% for both years. The Covid 19 pandemic forced them to shift to a predominantly remote service, but even during this period they have managed to connect with a large number of service users and to record good outcomes. In April-September 2020, 671 service users accessed the service, 124 finished the intervention, and 79% showed a significant increase in wellbeing.

In answer to your question, in Wokingham, it is anticipated that there could be as many as 1,200 people supported by this service with 41% expected to go to other services, Citizens Advice, LINK visiting scheme, Age UK. This service will co-ordinate and nurture the voluntary sector response creating an allied response. They are going to work with the voluntary sector as well as GP practices so they will be visible in the community. I think it is a very successful organisation. They are shortly coming to Wokingham which is great news, and their services will be of real value to our residents.

85.4 John Booth asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question:

In the Topic Paper 'Local Green Space January 2020', which accompanied the Draft Local Plan Update consultation, the site LGS09, Site name, Land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road, known locally as Kennet Mouth is appraised but is recommended not to be designated as Local Green Space. In the justification for this the following statement is made:

"The majority of the site is also surrounded by commercial and employment development (notably Sutton Business Park and Thames Valley Park) which are dominant in the landscape."

But neither of these is apparent or impinges in any way upon the enjoyment of the site, let alone being 'dominant in the landscape'. This is because the Suttons Business Park is hidden by the embankment of the 1840 Great Western Railway and Thames Valley Business Park is hidden by the raised area of chalk outcrop to the east of the site known as Broken Brow.

Photographs from the site looking south and east have been sent separately to the Executive Member. Do you agree that the description of the site in the Topic Paper is misleading and factually incorrect and should be removed from the document?

Answer:

The Draft Plan consultation undertaken last year was a key step in the preparation of new planning policies to guide our development. It allowed everyone the opportunity to express their views on what we got right, what we got wrong and things we could improve on. We are now carefully considering everyone's comments as we decide how to move forward.

To comment specifically on the issue of Local Green Space you refer to, the Draft Plan

considered only a handful of areas that had been put forward at that time. Through responses to the Draft Plan and subsequent correspondence with Town and Parish councils, and other members of the public, we have received suggestions for over a further 100 additional Local Green Spaces.

In some circumstances, different views have been put forward by different people as to the extent of area that might merit designation as Local Green Space as well as different reasoning. This is the case in the Kennet mouth area which you refer to, where a wider area has now been promoted, including much greater supporting information to explain its suitability for designation as a Local Green Space.

Recommendations on the merits across the Borough will be reported to Executive later this year as we prepare for our next draft Plan.

As you will be aware, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any merits of any individual proposals at this time, however I can assure you that the view of all respondents will be considered as we move forward, including the matters you refer to, where necessary and justified, as we move forward with our draft proposals, and all those items will be amended.

Supplementary Question:

I am very pleased with the supplementary consultation, which I think came out in May, after the main consultation was over, which allowed many groups to make their views known, and I am sure accounted for many of the 100 extra proposals.

The supplementary question, maybe you have already answered it, is will the Council recommend the designation of the site as a Local Green Space, and if not why not?

Supplementary Answer:

As I have said, I think you know my credentials being on the Planning Committee that saved this site through the MRT proposals, so I do not think you need to question my integrity and what can be done.

I can assure you that it will be looked at. What I can say is that the proposals now are far stronger than what was submitted originally, because you submitted a very small space but now, we have got the whole of the area which banks the river which would make it a lot stronger.

85.5 Helen Palmer asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question:

The Topic Paper Local Green Space, accompanying the Draft Local Plan Update, referring to the site, "Land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road" states:

"The site holds no formal recreational or historical value."

The route, being free from motorised traffic, and running between green space and the river, is heavily used by walkers, runners and cyclists, including many locals who have health issues restricting the distance they can walk.

Others come from further afield to follow the Thames Path or National Cycle Route 4.

The Thames Path is a lovely route, nationally and internationally renowned. Walking it myself, I met several groups of people who had come from overseas specifically to walk this path. It would be a local disgrace to allow “our” section of this famous path to be spoilt, for example by a main road bringing air and noise pollution.

During lockdown, heavy use led to creation of a second path alongside the Thames Path, allowing for social distancing. This land should not be narrowed by infrastructure.

Will councillors ask the officers to strike out this statement in the Topic Paper and substitute a statement that reflects the recreational importance of this site?

Answer

As mentioned previously, the consultation on the Draft Plan last year provided an opportunity for everyone to express their views, which I am sure you did, to look at what we got right, what we got wrong and things we can improve on.

The Draft Plan considered only a handful of areas, of which the site you referred to, was put forward. In the next step of the process, we invited Town and Parishes, that were invited originally, but there was little correspondence which came forward, and other community groups and organisations to identify other areas of green space of which the number has now gone up into excess of 100, as previously mentioned.

Different views have been put forward to the extent of the area that might merit designation as well as different reasoning. In addition to the smaller proportion, and I must emphasise, the site that was put forward, and I do not know who put it forward, was a very, very small site, that you refer to. It would not encompass all the dialogue that you have just mentioned in terms of the recreation area. I do not know if you are aware of what site you put forward, but it was a very small site.

We have now got further information purporting to explain the suitability of designation. As I said earlier, it would not be appropriate for me at this stage, because we have got quite some time to go through before we take the merits of the next Local Plan and we take the Local Green Spaces to Executive.

We can assure you that the outcomes will be documented in a future update and any changes will be updated on the Topic Paper and will be available to view and comment on in a future consultation that I hope will go out this summer.

85.6 Andrew Mennie asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question. Due to his inability to connect to the meeting the following written answer was provided:

Question:

With the increase in number of families from outside of the UK into our Borough, and their introduction to the UK schooling system as a basis for this question, may I ask if consideration could be given to providing a more human-centric method of integrating new arrivals, such as my family, into the system?

Having recently gone through this process, I can say that being directed to websites as one's only resource is not always a helpful or stress-free solution. Many of us originate from countries where governments and government processes are not instinctively

considered as being helpful to individuals, but rather as mechanisms of persecution.

To that end, having a person with whom one can engage, rather than just the web-based tools would be of significant value and much appreciated. There are many ways in which this might be implemented and beneficial for all stakeholders.

Could I request that WBC investigate ways of improving communications on matters, such as the education system, for families arriving from countries where situations may be very different, including provision for tailored telephone support with a named caseworker where appropriate or proactive engagement opportunities and information output in partnership with typical immigration conduits?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council's published admission arrangements are set in line with the Government's School Admission Code. This ensures that all applications are processed fairly, and places allocated appropriately without any prejudice.

In addition to supporting the web-based provision we also respond to email and telephone enquiries relating to the school admissions service which has remained operational throughout the last year. In responding to the large volume of telephone and e-mail enquiries they provide direct support and advice on admissions arrangements directly to parents and carers. I am sorry that this does not seem to have been your experience, and I will look into this for you.

The School admissions team consists of 7 officers who are responsible for the main coordinated processes involving over 6,000 applications and 24,000 preferences to ensure that all students transition to various different stages of their education at the correct time. These processes have continued to run during the pandemic, meeting all statutory timelines.

The team are also responsible for dealing with in-year applications, from families moving to the area either from within the UK or abroad or from those seeking alternative school places at different schools from where their child is studying. 1806 in year applications were processed from September 2018 – August 2019 and 1482 were processed from September 2019 to August 2020, although the in-year process ceased whilst schools were closed from March to June 2020 in line with Government guidance.

85.7 Carol Jewell asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question:

I share the concern of residents over the dangerous crossing point along Bader Way, Woodley – where it is intersected by the path from Kingsford Close (off Colemansmoor Road) to Mortimer's Meadows and Dinton Pastures. I am aware that a change in the speed limit is being discussed at Borough level, but more immediate action needs to be taken.

What is the Council doing to address this dangerous crossing point that is a) between two bends on a fast road, b) needs much better signage and c) should be clearly marked?

Answer:

Officers are aware of concerns raised by users of the footpath between The Moors Open

Space and Dinton Pastures and the safety of crossing Bader Way. The existing informal crossing point is used seasonally, with crossing activity fluctuating over the year. There has been a noticeable increase in crossing movements and concerns raised during the Covid pandemic. There are however suitable alternative routes that allow pedestrians to cross over Bader Way more easily both in the south by walking under the bridge that takes Bader Way across the River Loddon and to the north by using the uncontrolled crossing points at the Bader Way-Mohawk Way roundabout.

The Bader Way is subject to the national speed limit and data indicates that speed limit compliance is generally good, despite some instances of speeds in excess of the limit during off peak hours, with average peak hour speeds below 40mph and off-peak average speeds of 53mph. The existing speed limit is considered appropriate and any reduction is unlikely to secure the support of Thames Valley Police.

As a district distributor route, the function of the road is to carry high volumes of traffic between separate areas of the Borough. Despite being a busy connecting route, gaps in traffic present opportunities for pedestrians to cross the road safely. It would not, however, be considered safe to introduce a formal pedestrian crossing facility on a high-speed road, without a reduction in the speed limit and physical measures to support this, which would be in contradiction of the road's function and purpose.

The road has a generally good safety record with six reported injury collisions in the past 10 year period of which four involved slight injury and two were serious, but none involving a pedestrian. In the vicinity of the existing crossing point one slight collision was recorded, a single vehicle incident in which a vehicle hit an object in the road, 100m south west of the crossing.

Notwithstanding this, officers have undertaken site assessment of the existing seasonal facility and a scheme to improve driver awareness of the likelihood of pedestrians crossing, whilst maintaining adequate signage is currently awaiting implementation.

Supplementary Question:

The signs that warn of the crossing are 400 yards before the actual crossing. There is no signage nearer the crossing point. Would you agree that extra, closer signage, would provide an increase in safety for pedestrians and better warning for motorists, as well as reflectors on the wooden bollards?

Supplementary Answer:

I am not in a position to respond to that so I will have to respond in writing from the Officers.

85.8 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

At the 16th June 2020 Full Council meeting, I asked what was being done about the poor (and in my opinion, dangerous) state of the footbridge across the railway and motorway at Earley Station. The reply I received was that the condition of the bridge was being monitored and that funding had been allocated and design for replacement was "work in progress". I asked a supplementary as to whether the design and replacement could incorporate disabled access for the London bound platform and could it be programmed to coincide with the new Northern Distributor bridge installation to minimise disruption and

costs. The reply I got to that was that disabled access at Winnersh Triangle was being looked at and with regard to Earley, the answer was; "I will get someone to look at it to see if it is financially viable".

So, nine months on, I would like to know the status of the funded and planned replacement of the footbridge at Earley Station, assuming careful consideration has been given to provision of access (i.e. lifts, stair lifts or ramps) as required by relevant legislation (e.g. Disability Discrimination Act 1995).

Answer:

As you probably know, WBC has commenced a project to replace the WBC owned footbridge which links Nightingale Road in Woodley to the Earley Station forecourt (but not to the platforms). The project is currently at the detailed design stage and for the avoidance of doubt will be Equalities Act compliant with both ramp and stair access. Network Rail were approached as part of this design process to seek their collaboration specifically around incorporating access onto their platforms. Unfortunately, Network Rail have informed the Council that they are not interested in a collaboration at this time, and consequently we are unable to include this element within this project. Ultimately it is Network Rail's responsibility to ensure that access to their platforms are compliant with the Equalities Act, and whilst we, as a Council, are willing to collaborate, we are unable to compel them to undertake the works.

Supplementary Question:

I am very concerned about the state of the bridge. If you went and had a close look at it yourself, you would see that there is significant and advanced spoiling of the concrete uprights and sections. It is good to hear that it is in detailed design stages. It is disappointing to hear that it is not being picked up by Network Rail, but it is obviously not in their funding programme for the next 5 years. Could the Council incorporate the features into the design so that at some future stage perhaps, disabled access could be allowed?

Supplementary Answer:

We can certainly look at that Mike.

86. PETITIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

87. REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES BY THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (IRP)

The Council considered the Review of Members Allowances by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Bob Nancarrow, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel, introduced the report. He thanked his fellow Panel members; Diana Anderson, Angela Slade, Ian Newlove and David Harwood for their work and their time.

He indicated that the Panel had been formed in November 2019. It had met 15 times, with most of these meetings being held virtually. The IRP had met with a number of Members to hear their views and had issued a survey to which 34 responses had been received.

Bob Nancarrow took the Council through the report's recommendations.

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

Having seen an advance copy of a proposed amendment John Halsall indicated that he did not support reducing Members Allowances. Members gave up a lot of their time to serve their communities. He felt that the allowance levels should not prove a limiting factor to those in the community who wished to become councillors.

John Kaiser thanked the IRP for their efforts.

Lindsay Ferris also thanked the IRP and indicated that the Liberal Democrats supported their recommendations. He stated that it was not the right time to change or increase Members Allowances when so many people had lost their jobs or were experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. The publication of the IRP's recommendations in the local media had been appreciated.

Andy Croy proposed the following amendment to recommendation 1. It was seconded by Rachel Burgess.

- 1) ~~No changes are made to the basic allowance for the financial years consisting of 2020/21 and 2021/22;~~ ***the basic allowance be reduced to the basic allowance applicable in financial year 2010/11;***

Andy Croy thanked the IRP for their work. He particularly welcomed the proposed changes to the dependent and carers elements of the allowances, and the stronger language around the need for sufficient IT facilities. Andy Croy indicated that Labour councillors had always set their allowances at the 2010 level.

Rachel Burgess emphasised that taxpayers money should be spent wisely.

John Halsall, the proposer of the report, did not accept the amendment to the recommendation.

Stephen Conway indicated that he did not support the amendment and the reason the IRP was an independent panel was to depoliticise the issue of Members Allowances. Members had the opportunity to choose not to take the full allowance offered to them if they wished. The Council should do all it could to enable all sections of the community to become councillors.

Pauline Helliard-Symons welcomed the IRP's proposals to amend the carers and dependent element of the allowance. She stated that she did not support the proposed amendment and that it would not save the Council a sufficient amount of money.

Carl Doran emphasised that he took the allowance at the 2010 level. He felt that the difference between that and the current level was one which most Members could accept.

Gary Cowan suggested that the Constitution be amended so that Members merely accepted the recommendations of the IRP in the future.

Andy Croy requested that recommendation 1 and recommendations 2-7 be voted on separately. This was agreed by the Mayor.

RESOLVED: That Council agree that:

- (1) No changes are made to the basic allowance for the financial years consisting of 2020/21 and 2021/22;
- (2) The £500 component of the Basic Allowance for the provision of IT should only be claimed by those Members who provide facilities which allow constituents and Officers to communicate with them by e-mail, in addition to having adequate equipment and connections to allow for effective participation in virtual meetings, and the self-certification process related to this component of the basic allowance be continued;
- (3) No changes are made to any of the existing rates for Special Responsibility Allowances;
- (4) No changes are made to the Travel and Subsistence Allowances;
- (5) No changes are made to the Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral Allowances;
- (6) The Dependent and Carers allowance be restructured to the following, from April 2021:
 - i) A maximum claimable rate of £10 per hour be instated, to rise with the national living wage rate as and when this overtakes the stated figure. This rate is claimable by Members with direct caring responsibilities, and should primarily be used for non-specialist childcare (e.g. babysitting);
 - ii) A maximum claimable rate of £20 per hour be instated, to rise by the same monetary increase as granted to part i of the Dependent and Carers allowance. This rate is claimable by Members with direct caring responsibilities, and should be used for specialist care (e.g. medically trained staff care including mental health, care for a number of young children for which a babysitter would not be appropriate, care which includes lifting or moving an adolescent or adult). An invoice, of any description, is required to claim for this rate.

Both of the above are claimable up to a combined maximum of 35 hours total per month, and the carer must not be a member of the Councillor's family that lives at the same address. In exceptional circumstances, claims above the 35 hour monthly limit can be agreed with the Lead Specialist for Democratic and Electoral Services, subject to provision of suitable evidence.
- (7) During the next municipal year, when a review of Members' Allowances is not required, the IRP are given permission to publish a press release in local news and via WBC media sources, with administrative support from Democratic Services Officers. The content of this piece will focus on the views of Panel members, both before and after appointment to the Panel, on Members' Allowances and the work of a Councillor.

88. CARE AND SUPPORT PROCUREMENT

The Council considered a report regarding the Care and Support Procurement.

It was proposed by Charles Margetts and seconded by Richard Dolinski that the recommendations set out within the report be agreed.

Charles Margetts stated that the Council wished to move its home care and supported living services into a procurement framework. The total value of these contracts was £14million per annum (£74million over 5 years, allowing for inflation). During 2018/19, 1,860 people had received support and care services commissioned by the Council and 1,320 had received the support within their own home. Traditionally sourcing suppliers had been split between the Council and Optalis, with the majority of procurement being done by Optalis. When the brokerage function had moved inhouse in December 2019, it had provided an opportunity to look at this area and find a better, more efficient system. The framework would be public, on the Council's website, and would set out the standards expected of the Council's providers. Charles Margetts went through some the standards that providers would be expected to meet.

Richard Dolinski emphasised the importance of supporting residents to remain independent in their own homes and the community for as long as possible, and not within residential care homes. He highlighted the responsibilities of the local authority under the Care Act. The Care and Support Procurement Framework would strengthen the Council's position to deliver even better outcomes for residents.

David Hare thanked Adult Social Care Officers for their work on the report. He felt that the framework would allow more economical commissioning of high-quality services for vulnerable adults.

Andy Croy commented that the main cost of care was staff salaries. He expressed concern that if suppliers were squeezed in any way, this could have a negative impact on the workers. He went on to question why the framework had not been presented to Overview and Scrutiny prior to its presentation to Council.

Charles Margetts indicated that evidence suggested that there would not be downward pressure on carers' wages. The procurement framework would be publicly available on the Council's website, but he was happy for the implementation to be scrutinised.

RESOLVED: That Council gives approval for:

- 1) Officers proceeding with the Support and Care procurement, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) Officers creating a compliant framework, from which to call off support and care packages;
- 3) The Director of Adult Social Services having delegated authority to approve business cases to enter into call off agreements with successful organisations for individual or block contracts where price and quality benefits are achieved.

89. COUNCIL TAX BASE 21/22

The Council considered the Council Tax Base 21/22.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendation within the report be accepted.

John Kaiser advised that the number of homes subject to council tax had increased by 1.75%. Establishing the number of homes subject to council tax enabled the Borough and Town and Parish councils to set their precepts.

Lindsay Ferris stated that within the council tax base there was a 1% allowance for non-payment of council tax, the same level as the previous year. However, he felt that there was a greater pressure on council tax collection this year as a result of the pandemic, and questioned whether the 1% was sufficient.

John Kaiser commented that he had been assured by Officers that 1% would be adequate.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Council Tax Base, for the whole area and by Parish, as set out in the report, be agreed.

90. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2021/22

The Council considered the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2021/22.

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

John Kaiser advised that it was proposed that the carers allowance be disregarded in the award calculation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, meaning more carers would be able to access the financial resources. The exclusion from council tax would also be extended to care leavers up to the age of 25, which would take effect from April 2021.

Sarah Kerr was pleased to note the disregarding of carers allowance income in council tax reduction assessments, and the removal of council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25. She indicated that in the UK there were 900,000 unpaid carers who relied on carers allowance and who received just £67.25 a week, the lowest benefit of its kind. Disregarding the carers allowance from the calculation was therefore the right thing to do. Sarah Kerr went on to state that the consultation on the council tax reduction scheme had been very confusing and asked why views on child maintenance and child benefit had been included in one question, when they were two different matters. Consultations needed to be sufficiently clear. With regards to the exemption of care leavers from council tax, whilst positive, this measure had been requested some time ago by the Corporate Parenting Board.

Rachel Burgess welcomed the proposals relating to care leavers and carers allowance but felt that they could have been put in place much earlier. She questioned why only one of the seven proposals considered, proposed an increase to support. In addition, she stated that previously the savings levels that recipients were allowed to have, had been reduced from £16,000 to £4,000, reducing the number of those who were eligible for the scheme. The amount available to the scheme had also reduced since 2013. Rachel Burgess questioned whether other measures could be put in place such as the back dating of claims.

Pauline Helliar-Symons and Emma Hobbs welcomed the removal of council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25, and indicated that this had first been raised by the Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but at that time there had not been sufficient funding to put the scheme in place.

Andy Croy commented that the consultation had received a large number of responses, many of them positive, and that it was important to give residents a scheme which met their needs.

Prue Bray reemphasised that it had taken some time for the proposals around care leavers and the carers allowance to be brought in. She felt that there was more that could be done but things were moving in the right direction.

John Halsall commented that at a time of national emergency he was pleased to be able to help vulnerable residents.

Carl Doran questioned the relevance of John Halsall's speech in relation to the item.

In accordance with rule 4.2.15.4, Chris Bowring requested a recorded vote. This was agreed.

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Parry Batth		Keith Baker
Rachel Bishop Firth		Shirley Boyt
Laura Blumenthal		Rachel Burgess
Chris Bowring		Andy Croy
Prue Bray		Carl Doran
Jenny Cheng		Malcolm Richards
UllaKarin Clark		
Stephen Conway		
Gary Cowan		
Richard Dolinski		
Lindsay Ferris		
Michael Firmager		
Paul Fishwick		
Jim Frewin		
Maria Gee		
Guy Grandison		
Charlotte Haitham Taylor		
John Halsall		
David Hare		
Pauline Helliard-Symons		
Emma Hobbs		
Graham Howe		
Clive Jones		
John Kaiser		
Sarah Kerr		
Dianne King		
Abdul Loyes		
Tahir Maher		
Charles Margetts		
Adrian Mather		
Ken Miall		
Andrew Mickleburgh		
Stuart Munro		

Gregor Murray		
Barrie Patman		
Angus Ross		
Daniel Sargeant		
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey		
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey		
Caroline Smith		
Chris Smith		
Wayne Smith		
Bill Soane		
Alison Swaddle		
Simon Weeks		

Upon being put the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Council agree the proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2021/22 and that:

- 1) a local CTR scheme for 2021/22 be adopted on the same basis as the 2020/21 scheme with the addition of disregarding Carers Allowance in the award calculation;
- 2) the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1st April 2021 in respect of the Prescribed and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit schemes
- 3) funds be made available to the hardship fund, known as Section 13a (S13a) scheme, for those who cannot pay their council tax liabilities.
- 4) Members note the linkages to the broader Anti-Poverty strategy of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the S13a scheme.

91. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS

The Council considered the Timetable of Meetings for 2021/22.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the timetable of meetings be agreed.

John Halsall indicated that during the first lockdown meetings had initially been suspended and these had been restarted as soon as possible. Briefing meetings had taken place between the Group Leaders whilst meetings were suspended to keep Members updated. Meetings were now taking place successfully via Microsoft Teams. He went on to state that during the last two years the budget had been taken through Overview and Scrutiny. It was anticipated that physical meetings would begin at some stage, and that some would remain virtual, whilst others would be run as hybrids.

John Kaiser supported the timetable of meetings. He commented that the Council sought to provide support and services and seeking to find secrecy in mistakes made by Officers and Members, undermined this. He encouraged Members to participate in meetings and the decision-making process.

Lindsay Ferris questioned the relevance of John Kaiser's speech in relation to the item.

Clive Jones commented that there was rarely sufficient time to complete all the business on a Council meeting agenda, and that this was worsened if agreement was not given to extend the meeting to 11pm. He felt that this stifled debate and referred to some of the Motions which had not been heard due to time constraints. Clive Jones suggested that there should be another Council meeting to allow more business to be completed.

Guy Grandison referred to the importance of scrutiny. He chaired the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which had scrutinised the budget, and had had to schedule a number of extraordinary meetings in order to enable this. He thanked Officers for increasing the number of meetings in the proposed timetable as a result.

Gary Cowan commented that an extra Council meeting was needed to ensure that more business was completed, in the interest of residents.

Alison Swaddle commented that Council meetings now began at 7pm instead of 7.30pm. She felt that this should be sufficient to enable Council meetings to be completed by 10.30pm.

Jim Frewin suggested that an extra Council meeting be scheduled in either June or October.

John Halsall commented that a lot had already been done to expediate the Council meeting process including starting the meeting at 7pm and deleting some agenda items. He felt that an additional Council meeting would not solve issues.

RESOLVED: That the timetable of meetings be agreed.

92. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

92.1 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

What action has been taken so far with regards to implementing PM 2.5 monitoring across the Borough following the air pollution motion that this Council passed earlier this year?

Answer

I am very pleased to say that since passing this Motion the Council has been successful in securing funding from DEFRA to pay for an Eco Travel Officer whose responsibilities will include promoting sustainable transport, reducing NO2 levels, improving air quality, and continuing our proactive work in developing our action plans for Air Quality Management areas.

The Council is also preparing to roll out its plan for non-idling zones across the Borough. You may have already seen the results of the school's poster competition, which are currently being positioned in the highest effected areas of our road network.

Since passing the PM 2.5 Motion we have been working towards to understand how better

to monitor levels of particulate matter across the Borough. We believe that Reference Equivalent Monitors are the best solution to ongoing monitoring. It is our intention to install these in our Air Quality Management areas in Peach Street and in the Twyford Crossroads.

We are also considering where additional indicative monitors should be installed in other areas of the Borough. Likely areas would be around the Air Quality Management areas and in other areas where the DEFRA predicted maps predicted that PM 2.5 levels could be highest. A bid has been submitted through the 2021/22 MTFP to fund this monitoring equipment.

In addition to this, you should you also be aware that the Council is currently rolling out technology upgrades through its highways ITS project to deliver intelligent signalisation that can both reduce congestion and improve air quality.

Finally, I am pleased to confirm our involvement in the University of Reading Adept Live Lab programme that will see the adoption of digital technologies across Berkshire's highways network. 30 additional air sensors are being installed by the University of Reading to monitor how smarter traffic management could improve air quality. The results of this should also help create a dynamic Public Health tool that will enable us and our neighbouring authorities to make better traffic management decisions and air pollution interventions. I believe that this is a significant level of progress in the short time period since the Motion was passed.

Supplementary Question:

Can you confirm that once the monitoring starts should levels of PM 2.5 in any place in the Borough be in excess of the World Health Organisation recommended maximum level of 10 micrograms per cubic metre, urgent action will be taken to reduce it to below that level?

Supplementary Answer:

To be honest we have not discussed yet, local air pollution targets. Personally, I want to see and understand what the situation with PM 2.5 and other air pollutants are across the Borough so that we can take action in the highest zones that we have. We need to set local air quality targets, I completely agree with you on that, but what those should be at the moment we have not discussed. I am open to a conversation in terms of what those should be and how we progress to much more stringent targets locally.

92.2 Pauline Helliard-Symons asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

We have heard a lot on social media and in the newspapers about your proposed Waterproof Green Recycling Bags to keep our paper/card dry. Please can you explain in plain English how and when you propose to deliver these bags to the residents so that they can start using the bags to help to increase our recycling rates?

Answer:

The plan is that the new recycling bags to keep paper and card dry to maximise recycling and reduce costs will be delivered to residents with the annual blue bag delivery in February and March of this year. This will be accompanied by a communications campaign to help residents to use the bags as soon as they receive them.

The recycling bags have been manufactured within the agreed timescales abroad, but there are international shipping challenges, the bags are coming all the way from Vietnam, which are being experienced due to Covid and Brexit. The Council's officer team is working very hard to ensure that the bags are shipped so that these timescales can be met.

Supplementary Question:

There have been a number of reports about the roadside litter bins overflowing with litter. Can you please clarify what is being done to resolve that?

Supplementary Answer:

Because our residents are working from home and other people are home, they are taking walking exercises and our roadside bins have been overflowing. We have made additional plans with John Kaiser's blessing, to make extra funds available to increase the frequency of bins being emptied to keep our environment clear of litter.

92.3 Graham Howe asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question:

Reading have a Community Energy Fund, allowing charities and others to apply for grant funding to pay for solar panel installation and other green energy initiatives. This money is raised from local investors. Are Wokingham Borough Council planning to launch a similar scheme?

Answer

I am very pleased to say that a paper covering the creation of a Wokingham Community Energy Fund will be voted on by the Executive during its meeting next week.

The community energy fund is not a new concept. The Reading fund was founded in 2016 and other places that have them already include Sheffield, the City of London, Lincoln, Bristol, Islington, Oxford and Tees Valley.

Community Energy Funds serve multiple purposes. They increase the generation of renewable energy, enable sites that otherwise might not be able to afford or might not be of interest to large commercial backers to generate low-cost energy onsite and also create funds to improve communities, all underpinned by community ownership and community decision making.

The funds we are proposing would be backed by an organisation called Energy4All and initially supported by Reading Community Energy. Energy4All have been operating similar schemes since 2002 and currently do so for 28 different councils and other organisations around the country.

Energy4All, are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, will organise and facilitate the Community Share Offers which are used to then fund the different initiatives and installations as well as their upkeep.

Any profits made from the sale of energy, either to the National Grid or to the building operator, are then either paid as a dividend to investors or are ring fenced and used to support other sustainability efforts within communities. In recent years that dividend has typically been between 4 and 4.5% annually.

This scheme will help us reduce carbon emissions. It will help us to take additional control of our energy generation, storage and distribution. It will enable energy generation where currently there is none, and potentially provide a source of low-cost energy to some community and charity organisations.

It is a great opportunity to engage our communities and I look forward to the Executive voting on it next week, and I hope it will pass.

Supplementary Question:

What types of buildings would Councillor Murray think are most appropriate for the funding to be used from a Community Energy Fund?

Supplementary Answer:

Evidence from Reading suggests that installations typically are valued somewhere between £200 and £5,000, so it is mostly going to be small PV installations, although there are opportunities to go to larger alternative energy projects as well. As a result of that it is mostly likely to be as you say community and charities that will come forwards, charity offices, potentially churches, libraries, youth clubs, activity centres. I would love for the local Scout troops and Guide troops and everything else to come forward and get solar panels put on to their buildings as well. It will help them reduce some of their costs. It is also a great opportunity for some of our Town and Parish Councils to add some solar PV to some of their own buildings, and I know Woodley Town Council have already done that with a few of their buildings as well. I think it is a great opportunity for a load of different organisations across our Borough and I look forwards to seeing those bids come in.

92.4 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

What is Wokingham Borough Council doing to support schools at this difficult time?

Answer:

Since the start of the pandemic Wokingham Borough Council has provided continuous support to schools and settings via daily email briefings to headteachers with information and guidance. We also have weekly leadership roundtables for all headteachers.

We have also provided three roundtable sessions per week for key school staff, looking at things such as remote education, managing assessment etc. In the Spring we are going to look at Mental Health.

We also have a Covid Task Group which has been monitoring the impact of Covid.

The School Improvement Team and the Educational Psychology Team have worked in partnership to co-deliver the DfE Well Being for Education Return Programme which is a series of workshops and practical materials to support the Emotional and Mental Health and Well-Being of pupils and staff.

Since January we also have extraordinary round tables to address the set up of flow testing, looking at s44 Health and Safety at Work Act letters, staffing, risk assessments, and similar things.

All in all, we are in constant touch with our schools and we know what is going on, and we exchange views, and they give us intelligence on what is going on.

92.5 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question:

What is the result of the new traffic modelling on the Winnersh Relief Road roundabout since there is now nearly triple the amount of traffic on Woodward Close not including the SEND school, since all the design and modelling was based on only the existing houses?

Answer:

It is noted that this question has been asked during the September 2020 Council meeting. At this moment in time the past answer remains unchanged, which stated;

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

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

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

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

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

Supplementary Question:

There are 350 houses there not 250, so what are you planning to do about the extra 100 houses worth of traffic since no one seems to have a copy of the traffic modelling? I have asked for it several times and it has never been available.

Supplementary Answer:

I think I have replied to that Rachelle, but I am very happy to help you navigate to the traffic survey which is on the website.

92.6 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question:

I am still being questioned by residents in my ward about the accessibility to the buses on Broad Street in Wokingham. For many, even during Covid, using the buses is their only choice and their main form of transport. However, Broad Street is one of the few areas in Wokingham Borough where there are no raised kerbs, despite being one of the busiest places for bus use, which means that some people can no longer access the town independently. You would think, with all the work going on in Wokingham that there would be some funding to make it more accessible to all. So, my question is, when are we going to see a commitment to supporting people with different abilities get the raised kerbs that we desperately need?

Answer:

Providing enhanced bus stops in this location is not a simple, quick or cheap solution due to the topography of the area. There are complex constraints which prevent such enhancements being added to existing bus stop facilities without much wider works on Broad Street itself. Because the existing pavements here are very low and flat, installation of castle kerbs in this location would result in a ramped pavement (itself an accessibility issue) which would in turn lead to water draining from the pavements towards the properties rather than the gutter. Consequently, we will pick up this requirement as we progress future phases of the Town Centre Regeneration project which includes this section of Broad Street (as outlined in the Wokingham Public Realm Design and Delivery Strategy July 2013).

However, the absence of raised kerbs does not preclude people with mobility issues from accessing public transport in Broad Street. Local bus companies whose buses serve the Broad Street bus stops have policies that state that the ramp, which all of their buses are fitted with, should be deployed upon request. The ramp deployment is not just for wheelchair users. Local bus companies expect their drivers to offer assistance to anyone who requires it. If for any reason a driver does not deploy the ramp on request, this should be reported directly to the bus company so that the incident can be referred to the driver's manager.

Supplementary Question:

They are not deploying their ramps, only for wheelchair users. Quite simply are we going to get a commitment to when we are likely to see this area improved? Obviously, it has been talked about and while I understand the problems, we either need to move the buses to another location which can be improved, but there are certainly people who cannot get on and off the buses easily when the buses will not kneel low enough for the kerbs as the kerbs are really very low. Surely there is something which can be done more readily?

Supplementary Answer:

I would happily sponsor a conversation between the Officers, yourself and the Executive Member for Highways when she is back in train.

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

Question:

During the first lockdown the residents of Wokingham volunteered to help provide food and services to the vulnerable across the whole of Wokingham Borough, and I would like to add my thanks to the volunteers for all their help – so what did Wokingham Borough Council do when the first lockdown finished in June 2020; to continue to encourage, support and possibly increase the numbers of registered volunteers so that when another

long lockdown occurred as now, they were ready to go into immediate action to once again help the vulnerable in Wokingham?

Answer:

In the first lockdown a Voluntary and Community Sector Action Group was established, which initially met three times a week and now has continued since and now to meet twice a week with good attendance. This is led by a senior officer from WBC and consists of all the lead officers from organisations across the Borough, such as the CAB, the LINK, the Volunteer Centre, and various others. One of the products of this was One Front Door which has provided a single route for support and has been very successful from March 2020. The One Front Door was never stood down and will continue as long as is required.

During the first lock down lots of unofficial local Covid groups also sprung up. With the VCS the coordination charity Involve, supported their development and we now have 11 local Covid groups, and they are accepting referrals.

As the lockdown eased, the majority of these groups stood by to support residents across the Borough as required. The Friendship Alliance which is a VCS/ Wokingham Borough initiative to combat loneliness and isolation, took on the role of maintaining communication. The Friendship Alliance has also supported a couple of new groups which has ensured the whole Borough is covered.

The key task, to which you refer, is to ensure that we have sufficient volunteers to support the response to Covid. The Wokingham Volunteer Centre, which is a key part of the group, operates as the main contact and recruiting point for general volunteering. They respond to support the requirements and needs for volunteers across the Borough and react as the need changes. For instance, we needed more befrienders / welfare callers, and they ran an event, Volunteer Week to attract more. At the time of writing, we have always had more than enough volunteers to cover the needs of the community and the services we wished to run.

In recent times the need for volunteers has widened to provide support to the vaccination programme, which has been led by the Wokingham Volunteer Centre. The activities of some parts of the VCS have been stepped up over the winter. The approach has always been proportionate, and we have always tried to react to the changing need. We have always had more than enough volunteers to cover the services we need.

Supplementary Question:

We are not going to let any slide?

Supplementary Answer:

No, I can assure you that we are fully committed to seeing this through. One of the senior members of the Adult Social Care team leads this group and he reports directly into the Director. We need the Voluntary Sector because the bottom line is the Council cannot take on many of the tasks that the Voluntary Sector does, and also the Voluntary Sector is better at some of them than the Council would be. The vaccination call for volunteers has been an example of this and has generated nearly 500 volunteers in a very short period of time, which is more than enough basically to cover the need. We are committed to going forwards to when this is all over, and it will be some day, to learning lessons from this, learning good parts from this, and incorporating them into our thinking going forwards.

92.8 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question:

Exempting care leavers from council tax up to the age of 25 was raised at a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board as far back as October 2019. Why hasn't this exemption been introduced yet?

Answer:

You heard my reply tonight. It is in the Medium Term budget so it will be done.

I will give you a little bit of a background though. In 2019 it was something that I would have liked to have done at that point. We were facing a £2million overspend in Children's Services that we had to fund, and we had to fund from reserves. I did not believe at that time that it was prudent for us to do that. This year Children's Services have got themselves in a lot better shape, and this year they have come in with a very, very good performance on budget, so I believe that now is the time to introduce it. Like all these things, poverty and vulnerable people, they do need support. I will do everything I possibly can to support these people, but I will not put the financial aspects of the Council at risk.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for your answer. I am a bit non plussed by it. I know that Councillor Clark, who is the Lead Member for Children's Services was at that meeting of 2019 of Corporate Parenting Board, as were other members of the Executive. I appreciate that there were problems with the Children's Services finances, obviously I understand that, but I also know that the amounts involved to make this change are immaterial for the Council. I do not understand why there has been a delay of almost 18 months in introducing that change. The Council has been legally responsible for these care leavers since 2018 and obviously the last 10 months or so they will have faced even more challenges. Do not forget that it is too late for some of those care leavers now. How can that long delay possibly be justified when the amounts for the Council are not material, and it is vulnerable people's lives we are talking about?

Supplementary Answer:

You may be interested to know Rachel that all the immaterial costs for the Council all add up and become material. You have to make a decision based on the facts at the time. My decision at that time, I wanted to do it, I was not prepared to extend the situation that we had in Children's Services at that point. I now find myself, because of prudent management of the finances, that we can do it, and I would have hoped to have done more had it not have been for Covid, but we are going to take another hit on Covid this year, another hit on the reserves. It is a shame because as far as I am concerned poverty is not a political issue, it is a true issue and people suffer with it. I will do whatever I can, but I will not jeopardise the financial probity of the Council because if I put myself in that situation as I have said many occasions, a broke Council cannot help anybody.

92.9 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Families with children in receipt of free school meals, where the children are now learning from home, deserve continued support.

It is evident in some parts of the country that the food parcels being provided in lieu of free school meals are totally inadequate.

For the second full week of term, can you list the items of food typically provided per child, along with their notional supermarket cost, in a typical free school meal parcel provided by the Council's contracted supplier?

Answer:

Wokingham's contracted caterer, Caterlink, has prepared boxes in line with the Food Standards and the Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA) guidelines. Our boxes are produced as fortnightly hampers and differ in volume depending on whether the child is in primary or secondary education.

For our supermarket comparison, we have assessed both Tesco and Waitrose since school catering companies, such as Caterlink, do not have the equivalent buying power that industry giants such as Tesco or ASDA would have when buying produce. Furthermore, Caterlink aims to "source local" to reduce the carbon impact of food transportation on the global climate crisis, as well as selecting quality food for the meals, rather than standard items.

The food parcels are a standard offering from Caterlink, and we have been assured that the food parcel that we provide more than covers a lunchtime meal that they would provide if a child were in school.

Our hampers are charged at £21 per primary student and £22 per secondary student, and this includes labour costs to produce the individual hampers. The comparison cost for the contents only for primary students if purchased from Tesco would be £19.61, and £22.45 if purchased from Waitrose. For secondary hampers, the comparison cost if purchased from Tesco would be £20.78, and £23.85 if purchased from Waitrose.

We believe this represents good value for money, as the remainder of any Free School Meal funds are retained by the school, which they are able to invest in alternative ways to additionally support these vulnerable children. I would be happy to provide the comparison list in writing following Full Council so you can see the comparisons yourself.

Supplementary Question:

My question is what are you trying to hide?

Supplementary Answer:

We are not hiding anything, but I only have 2 minutes to answer your question, and I have a full list here of prices. Would you have preferred that I read the Tesco and Waitrose comparisons? Is it numbers that you want? I will send it to you.

92.10 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question. Due to time constraints the following written answer was provided:

Question:

Parents of children on free school meals and others who are on low incomes are being hit by another unexpected expense during this lockdown. To enable home learning, they are having buy computer paper, printer ink, notepads, folders, and other stationery which they can ill afford. I have even heard of one mum who is writing her child's worksheets by hand

because she has no printer.

In normal times the schools would be supplying this material and I presume they have stock within the schools but not the means of distribution.

Can Councillor Clark please assure me that Council will work with schools to rectify this situation as a matter of urgency?

Answer:

Wokingham Borough Council is working directly with all schools in responding to the impact of the pandemic.

We have been in regular contact between schools and attached officers to gather intelligence to inform where and what support is required and provided guidance and signposting in respect of remote learning and meeting the standards for remote learning as set out by the government.

We have advised all schools to be mindful of the need for resources such as pens and paper and have requested that the need for home printing be avoided to ensure that all children can engage in remote learning equitably.

We are working with the voluntary and community sector on how we can further support children's remote learning during this time and will be exploring with others on the availability of hardcopy materials where necessary to support the curriculum.

We would advise that any parent that is experiencing difficulty raise this immediately with their school, so that a local solution can be found. And we will continue to support schools as I have outlined.

The ongoing wellbeing of all Wokingham learners is a key concern for us all, and I can confirm that we will continue to work with all schools in the Borough to support children's ongoing learning experience and attainment.

93. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

93.1 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question:

I would like to thank him first of all for engaging with me on the concerns that nursery staff in Twyford have, who understandably feel rather exposed in the current pandemic. The lateral flow testing that the Council is introducing will help here I am sure, but I would be really grateful if he could explain how this will work in the case of nursery staff?

Answer:

Obviously, we have been in contact about this, and I have had emails and correspondence from nursery staff also who are concerned about this. As you said, we are launching a community based lateral flow programme, and the whole focus of this is on essential workers who cannot work from home and have to work through lockdown. So, groups eligible for this will be: nursery staff, blue light services, essential retail, postal workers, couriers, construction workers, a full list is on the website basically. The aim is to sweep up everybody who is defined as an essential worker in this lockdown.

To answer your question directly, it is going to be done initially via the Wokingham Centre which is open. Two further centres are planned which will be rolled out over the next month or so. We will look at the service and we are prepared to fund this to whatever level because we realise the importance of this. If this proves to be a runaway success, we will expand it to meet the demand as necessary. We understand how all these people are worried and nervous basically given the situation, and we want to support them. I would encourage the nursery that you are involved in to get in contact and to look for details on the website. All we are asking from people in return, and I should be very clear about this, is that lateral flow testing only has a point if it is done ideally twice weekly and at least once weekly. We are going to be asking anybody who comes forward for this service, to make that commitment, because otherwise there is no point in doing it as it just tells you at that week if you have Covid or not. It offers you no guarantee for the future, so that is what we will be asking people, but the service will be there very shortly.

93.2 Jim Frewin asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

At the last Full Council meeting in November last year, I yet again raised concerns for the safety of Grazeley residents given the number of accidents which sadly included two fatalities. Tonight, 21 January, is the fourth anniversary of the first of those fatal accidents. There is an excellent article in this week's Wokingham Today paper which articulates and demonstrates how we as a Council have responded to those dreadful incidents over the past 4 years. To be fair, we have recently resurfaced a section of highway and refreshed road markings. Other than that, we have gathered and looked at a huge amount of data. We have looked at the feasibility of a speed camera, and we have looked in conjunction with the Parish Council, at potential gateway signage. We have looked at this issue for 4 years. In the eyes of the residents, we have looked at, but not taken any action. We have left residents living in fear, and we have left residents taking their own engineering activities to protect their homes, such as reinstalling driveway gates. When can I expect to receive the written response to my supplementary question asked in November? I have waited patiently but not received it yet. And can Grazeley residents expect to see any tangible action with regards to their safety as a result of all of the looking that we have undertaken? If we are not going to do anything let us tell them, not leave them resting for 4 years.

Answer:

I am aware that this issue has been dragging on. One of the reasons, and it could be the reason, for which it has been dragging on, is that we are still awaiting a report from the Police. I do not know whether we have had it, but if you asked a supplementary in November then we should certainly reply to it. I will make sure that it is replied to, but I am very happy to sponsor a meeting between the officers, the Executive Member for Highways and yourself, to discuss this.

93.3 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question:

We have nearly 700 signatures to a Liberal Democrat petition against building on Swallow's Meadow in Hawkedon ward, which I am sure you will agree is a very good number of signatures. One of my residents has asked me if I have seen the developers' ecology report. This is the report that one of the contractors who was cutting down the trees and bushes on the site, in November, claimed, showed that there was no evidence of any wildlife living in Swallow's Meadow, not even a mouse. Absolute rubbish. Can the Executive Member for the Environment find out if Wokingham Borough Council has got a

copy of the ecology report, and if they have, will he ask them to share it with the Hawkedon ward members?

Answer:

I fully support what you say. I will look into this and I will ask the appropriate questions, and I will get back to you.

93.4 Caroline Smith asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

At the beginning of October 2020, we were informed of a Wokingham Traffic Road Order consultation which had started on 13 October, and according to the maps on the website, these TROs may adversely affect the residents of Hilmanton. The TRO consultation website has only one single document, a PDF reference POO820, which comprises of some 29 maps with no index, and we are still waiting for draft orders, statement of reasons, and an index of plans. Please can you tell me when this is going to happen?

Answer:

Genuinely Caroline I have no idea. I am prepared to take it up on your behalf or if you would like to email Pauline.

93.5 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question:

In June last year Earley Town Council and the Earley Environmental Group both made submissions as part of the Local Plan Update consultation, seeking Swallow's Meadow in Hawkedon ward, to be designated as Local Green Space. I am afraid that subsequent to this the land has been sold and the new owners have indicated a wish build a supermarket and 40 new homes on this site, that had been rich in flora and fauna and a much-valued place for recreation. Given the fast pace that these unexpected events have unfolded, can the Executive Member please expedite the application for Local Green Space designation, rather than waiting for it to be considered with all the other LGS submissions?

Answer:

We can look into that David. I am very aware of this site, including the points that Clive has made and I am not aware of that report either, so I will pick up both matters.

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

Question:

An Arborfield resident asked me with the Local Plan evolving that we lost some fields that were concreted over, and as a result the Administration will not have any long grass to kick things into. I did reply that we have lots of green grass in the north they could use so it would not be a problem. I would wonder if the Leader could agree that that was an ok answer?

Answer:

I think it was a rhetorical question.

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

Leader of the Council, John Halsall:

Mr Mayor, I would like to ask your permission to hold a minute's silence for those who have died during the dreadful pandemic in the UK and the hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

The Executive have had to take a couple of urgent decisions over the last couple of months. All these decisions were considered urgent because they related to the Council's response to the Covid 19 pandemic, including the requirement to distribute Government funds as soon as possible. All these decisions were taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution and with the agreement of the Mayor. In accordance with the Constitution, I am therefore reporting on those specific decisions which because of their urgency, and the fact that any delay in implementing them, could have seriously prejudiced the Council's and all the public's interest, were not subject to 'Call In'. The decisions taken at recent Executive meetings under these rules were: On 24 September the Purchase of Covid 19 tests; on 2nd December Covid Winter Grant Scheme and Additional Restrictions Grant - Discretionary Grants Scheme Phase 1, then 17 December, the Adult Social Care Covid Response.

A question was raised at the Standards Committee, by a member of the public, Mr Philip Meadowcroft, as to whether the composition of its members was in conformance with 9.1.1 of the Constitution. He was correct, there was an anomaly, and I thanked him for raising it. Genuinely it was a surprise that the Committee had been so constituted for 21 months, spanning two Annual Council meetings. Neither had any member of the Committee or Officers, nor Members, nor the Press, raised this issue previously.

At this point in the meeting, Lindsay Ferris raised a point of order, referring to section 4.2.12 d. He felt that the Standards Committee matter should be referred to Overview and Scrutiny and that the member of the public and the Council should receive a public apology. He also felt that the Leader's discussion of the matter during the Council meeting was a conflict of interest.

95. CONTINUATION OF THE MEETING

At this point in the meeting, 10.05pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Stephen Conway.

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

96. CONTINUATION OF STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

At this point in the meeting, Alison Swaddle indicated that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had already discussed putting the Standards Committee process on to its work programme.

Leader of the Council, John Halsall (continued):

A question was raised by a member of the public, Philip Meadowcroft, as to whether the composition of its members was in conformance with 9.1.1 of the Constitution. He was correct. There was an anomaly. I have thanked him for raising it, and incidentally I have also apologised for dismissing him. Genuinely it was a surprise that the Committee had

been so constituted for 21 months, spanning two Annual Councils. Neither had any member of the Committee, nor Officers, nor Member, nor the Press raised this previously. If there is a fault it is jointly several of all. Had I been aware of the clause I would not have proposed our appointments. Indeed, immediately on being aware I corrected the membership to the rule. I have apologised to Members and Officers for this anomaly. I thank the members of the Committee, the Officers supporting the Committee and the Independent Person for all the good work that has been undertaken. The Chief Executive has assured Members that although an inconsistency existed, the appointments were made by Full Council and therefore were constitutional. The Chief Executive has also pointed out that the composition and the operation of the Standards Committee are not statutory but local preference.

I would like to thank all those who have played a part in helping those who have suffered not just the effect of the virus but the problems that have accompanied with it. This includes all carers, doctors, health staff, social care staff, emergency services, health, Police, Fire Rescue, Ambulance, teachers, school staff, charities, in short everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue in these unspeakable times. So, thank you to all of you. I would like the Council to give a round of applause for these heroes of the community without whom the world would have been a darker place.

We are continuing to face coronavirus, initially we thought it would be short. This has not been the case, however there is light at the end of the very dark tunnel with a vaccine developed here in record time. Thank you to our brilliant scientists.

We in WBC have navigated with a steady hand through the emergency, changing the way we worked, supporting all our residents and ensuring that services ran as normally as possible. Whilst this was expensive financially, it was eminently doable in the short term. Much of that which we did during the crisis we shall need to continue to do for some time. We are faced with additional challenges, the biggest and most important of is the role out of vaccinations across the Borough, and at the same time ensuring continuity in all our essential services which our residents rely on.

To this end the Council are committing to a further investment in our community to help GPs in our Borough to administer the vaccine as quickly as possible to all our residents. The investment is only possible because of the well run and excellent control that the Conservative administration has exerted over the Council's finances for many years. As such, I am pleased to announce an additional £1.2million to be made available during this financial year. The money will come from the Council's General Reserves, built up over the years despite being the lowest funded unitary in the UK. These funds will be made available not only to help the roll out of the vaccination programme but to boost and support our flytipping and anti flytipping initiative, assisting preschools, keeping the homeless and rough sleepers off the streets, and supporting charities, whom along with preschools are very much part of the vital support structure of our community. Tonight, you will hear my Executive talk about how this might be channelled to the areas needed in the community, how it is designed to help Wokingham Borough get back on its feet, repair the damage done in the past 10 months, and ensure those things which have been put on hold during the pandemic, can start to fully function again as quickly as possible. As my Deputy Leader, Executive Member for Finance and Housing has said many times, during the pandemic, reserves are like fire extinguishers, you can use them in time of need. I am sure you would agree that this is one of those and thankfully, and such like our commitment to child hunger, poverty and homelessness, the Conservative controlled Council will not be found wanting in these times when residents need support.

Lastly, please follow the Government guidelines for physical hygiene, social distancing, cover your face when required to do so, and encourage others to do so as well.

UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children’s Services:

I am pleased to announce that the Council is going to continue to cover the cost of free school meals during the school holidays in 2021. In respect of financial support for our schools, settings that claim their Early Years Education Grant have received 100% of this throughout the pandemic, regardless of whether the children on roll have attended or not. This continues, at least through this term. Where necessary the settings have made excellent use of the Covid Business Support Grant that our Council has made available. We recognise that in respect of private nurseries and preschools, some may be impacted by the loss of income from parents whose children are not attending due to the pandemic. To ensure that settings will still be in business once we come out of lockdown, we are therefore putting in place a new Wokingham Borough Council funded grant scheme to support such providers in their funding, and we will shortly be providing guidance on how to go about this.

As you will know, there is a Motion on tonight’s agenda regarding free school meals. There are three resolutions in that Motion, calling on action from the Council, and I would like to address those. As you are aware, we are using Government grants to cover free school meals during school holidays while the pandemic continues.

At this point in the meeting, Prue Bray reminded the meeting that in accordance with rule 4.2.23, the time for Executive Member statements should not exceed 20 minutes. The Mayor agreed that Councillor Clark could complete her statement, and one other Executive Member would be allowed to give their speech.

UllaKarin Clark, Executive Member for Children’s Services (continued):

We are also, and will continue to work with local organisations to make sure that no child in our Borough goes hungry. The Leader has joined me in writing to the Secretary of State for Education not just to ask for the expansion of our free school meals to be permanent for those with no recourse to public funds, but we are also going further in asking that consideration be given for an uplift in Universal Credit to make sure that no child goes without food. In addition to this we are asking that the free school meal provision for primary school children is permanently extended to include all primary school children and not just those in Reception and Year 1 and Year 2. Therefore, it would make sense for Councillor Bray to withdraw her Motion to make time for others, but if she insists on moving it, we will vote for it since we have already done everything in it. This Conservative administration will always be on the side of families and those in need.

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

I wanted to take this opportunity to update Members on the latest situation with Covid and our efforts to support the community. You will have heard from my colleague Councillor Halsall that the Council is releasing £1.2million from its reserves to fund further steps across the Borough. I would like to detail some of these for you. This expenditure is only possible because we have managed to rebuild our reserves since the first lockdown, and it shows our commitment to follow through what we say, with what we do basically when it comes to Covid 19.

The vaccination programme which is run by the CCG has got off to a good start locally and has been underway in Wokingham since mid-December. Vaccinations are now underway

in every part of the Borough. We estimate that 90% of care home residents and over 80's have received their first dose, 54% of social care staff, and 35% of 75-79 year olds. Vaccinations have now started in some areas in the 70-74 age group. I would like to thank our GPs and their staff who are working incredibly hard for our benefit. WBC is supporting GPs by assisting with volunteers, traffic marshals and resources. I would also like to thank all the volunteers for their help with this programme as well as our partners at the Wokingham Volunteer Centre who have helped organise the programme. It is important that we are realistic, Members, going forward. Indications that we are receiving from the health service and PHE is that it is likely that the vaccination programme will continue for the next few years, and we are planning for this situation. It is key that we speed up the vaccination programme on a local and national level. WBC is committed to ensuring that all Wokingham residents are vaccinated as soon as possible, and is actively lobbying the CCG, and local MPs for more vaccines. However, there is currently a national issue with the level of supply of vaccine which is restricting the growth of the programme across some parts of the country. Our GPs have more than enough capacity to deliver the current level of vaccine that they are receiving, so it is important to build the capacity now for the day when vaccine supply is greater. WBC has secured several sites across the Borough and is ready to move them into action as soon as there is vaccine supply available to make that worthwhile. WBC is funding this plan alongside our colleagues in the NHS and will be providing staff to run it when a supply of vaccine is available. We are also under the understanding that national Government plans to open a large vaccination centre in Reading, which will be available to Wokingham residents at some point in the near future.

As you heard earlier, we are planning to launch a community based lateral flow programme. This will focus on essential workers who cannot work from home, are working, and have no choice but to come into contact with other people during this lockdown. The aim of this is to lower the risk of Covid and its transmission by identifying those who may have the infection but no symptoms, and therefore do not know that they have it. This will apply to people who are Wokingham residents and to those who work in Wokingham but live elsewhere. The priority of this programme is to restrict the spread of Covid 19. I detailed earlier that the test centres will be set up and that the Wokingham one is ready now. WBC is recruiting staff to run this programme and expects to create in excess of 40 new jobs within our community to support this. Anyone who is interested in applying for one of these positions can see the details on the website. We will have the capacity to give lateral flow tests to 800 people a day across our test centres, and will expand the operation if it comes close to capacity, but also offer a mobile targeted testing facility to support outbreaks and other Covid related testing needs in our community. I would reemphasise the point that I made earlier, that lateral flow tests only work if they are done ideally twice a week, and at least once a week. Therefore, the Council will insist that anyone who commits, come for testing every week. Details of how to obtain testing will be on the website shortly.

In conclusion, Mr Mayor, I would say that vaccinations provide a real hope for the future, however, we still have the difficult winter months to come for its effects to be felt. It is important that for the short period of time, everyone follows the full lockdown advice, maintains social distance, wear a mask when appropriate and continue to isolate properly if asked to. Case numbers are now starting to fall in Wokingham, but it is really important that we continue to work together, to ensure that that work continues, until the situation is better.

97. MOTIONS

97.1 Motion 450 submitted by Andy Croy

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion, submitted by Andy Croy, and seconded by Carl Doran.

‘Council believes the Executive should commission a Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Emergency.

A Citizens’ Assembly on the Wokingham Borough response to the Climate Emergency is required to address the hard choices which need to be made if the Borough is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

To be effective and credible, the Citizens’ Assembly must be independent of the Executive and political parties. The Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) approved by Council on 23rd July 2020 has a significant gap between the carbon savings required and the carbon savings which are identified in the CEAP.

Council also notes the serious criticisms of the CEAP contained in the Overview and Scrutiny Management Task and Finish Group full report on the CEAP presented to the Executive on 29th October 2020.

Council also supports the following statements on the Local Government Association and UK Parliament websites.

The Local Government Association website states: “A citizens' assembly is a collection of individuals selected to be representative of the wider population”.

The UK Parliament website identifies several key features of a Citizens Assembly including “assembly members are representative of the wider population” and “independent facilitation: the assembly is not facilitated by the organisation that commissioned the assembly.”

Links to these sources and other resources can be found here:

[https://www.wokinghamlabourparty.org/green-vision/why-we-need-a-citizens-assembly-on-the-climate-emergency/.](https://www.wokinghamlabourparty.org/green-vision/why-we-need-a-citizens-assembly-on-the-climate-emergency/)

Andy Croy commented that there had not been meaningful engagement with the public on climate emergency. The Citizens Assembly must reflect the composition of the Borough and would act like a jury. Jury selection must be transparent and be seen to be free of bias. The Assembly could engage with a range of external experts and draw their own conclusions which the Council could benefit from. The Assembly would vote in secret on recommendations, and the Council must accept the recommendations of the Assembly.

Carl Doran commented that when the Council had declared a climate emergency, he had hoped it would directly involve residents, which he felt had not happened. He believed that a Citizens Assembly on climate emergency would help to take residents with the Council on the issue of climate emergency.

Gregor Murray commented that he agreed with the intent of the Motion, and supported engaging with the residents on climate emergency. However, Citizens Assembly was not a catch all term for engagement. It was one part of the local democratic process available

to the Council. He felt that agreeing the Motion would not give consideration to other methods available such as citizens juries, citizens advisory panels, consultations, citizens forum, focus groups, e panels, or more crowd sourcing, which could provide useful recommendations. Gregor Murray commented that it would be reckless to commit to one option without first considering the other options available. He had sought to amend the Motion so that the words 'Citizens Assembly' were substituted by the words 'Local Democratic Process' but this had been refused. He went on to comment that Extinction Rebellion favoured Citizens Assemblies at a national level but advocated a local democratic process, at local level.

Alison Swaddle agreed that it would be reckless to commit to one form of action, when the other options had not been fully explored. The Council owed it to residents to get it right as it was one of the most important things that was being undertaken for the next generation.

Tahir Maher emphasised that residents should be able to participate fully in their community and decisions that effected their life. He supported the Motion but noted that there were other options of engagement also available.

Gary Cowan and Sarah Kerr emphasised that the Motion did not preclude other options of engagement. However, John Halsall stated that he felt that the Motion did preclude other options of engagement.

Andy Croy commented that the amendment referred to by Gregor Murray would have negated the Motion. He felt that the Council had a poor record of engagement and needed to do better. He questioned what due diligence had been carried out with regards to the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

In accordance with rule 4.2.15.5, Gary Cowan requested a recorded vote, which was agreed.

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

DuBey		
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey	Barrie Patman	
Caroline Smith	Angus Ross	

97.2 Motion 451 submitted by Gregor Murray

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

97.3 Motion 452 submitted by Prue Bray

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.

97.4 Motion 453 submitted by Clive Jones

Due to time constraints this Motion was not considered.