



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

23 NOVEMBER 2020 to 22 DECEMBER 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', with a long, sweeping tail.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 13 January 2021



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

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MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.10 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes, Alison Swaddle, and Pauline Helliard-Symons (Substitute)

Officers Present

Carol Cammiss (Director of Children's Services), Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Keeley Clements (Director for Communities, Insight and Change), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director for Resources & Assets)) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Executive Members Present

Parry Batth, Ullakarin Clark, Charlotte Haitham Taylor and John Kaiser

49. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Emma Hobbs.

Pauline Helliard-Symons attended the meeting as a substitute.

50. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2 September 2020 and the Minutes of the extraordinary meetings held on 22 September 2020, 13 October 2020 and 28 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

51. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Graham Howe, as he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services. Graham stated that he would take no part in the discussion or voting for any of the Children's Services related budget items.

52. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

53. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

54. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021-24: REVENUE BUDGET

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 33 to 68, which set out the revenue growth and saving bids for the Directorates encompassing Children's Services; Communities, Insight & Change; and Resources & Assets.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Ullakarin Clark (Executive Member for Children's Services), Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Executive Member for Regeneration), Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Carol Cammiss (Director for Children's Services), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director for Resources & Assets), and Keeley Clements (Director for Communities, Insight & Change) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Ullakarin Clark stated that the figures presented to the Committee were only predictions, as due to the nature of Children's Services a child with exceptional needs could come into the Borough at any time, and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) were legally obliged to help. WBC had a statutory duty to help every child in the Borough who was in need of support, which made some financial predictions difficult. Ullakarin added that there were potential savings that could be realised within the Home to School Transport area, as a review had recently been carried out which officers were now working through.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Children's Services, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Where were Children's Services on their journey to achieving a "Good" OFSTED rating? Executive Member and officer response – WBC wanted to achieve a "Good" OFSTED rating, not only to provide a better service for residents across the Borough, but also because it costed the service significantly more to try and improve things on a reactionary basis. There were a number of special items, which would not be reviewed on the evening, which set out one off spends which would aid the service to move towards the goal of the "Good" OFSTED rating. Overall, progress towards this achievement was progressing well.
- Last year, there was a bid to help move more locum or agency staff towards being permanent, was this progressing? Officer response – This was a special item bid over three years, and progress was being made in line with expectations.
- Had the impact of Covid-19 (C-19), being that job losses or mental health issues, of parents been considered when compiling next year's projections? Officer response – 3 children were in the system who were not in place prior to C-19. Placement cost projections were based on a very stringent model, which was able to be based on factual information and inflationary costs of families within the Borough, or families known to be entering the Borough. It was not possible to accurately budget for those families with mental health issues, or those who may come into the Borough without prior notice, however this would be monitored through the "one front door" approach that WBC had developed with the voluntary sector.
- What would happen if a child was required to be placed in an independent residential school? Officer response – If it was a school provision, the funding would come out of the high needs block rather than the revenue budget. If it was a social care placement, this would be a pressure on the budget. WBC could only budget for what was known and what was expected, however if a child entered the Borough with a specific need, this would need to be met to the level required.
- What caused the jump between 2018/19 and 2019/20 budgetary differences within the social work legal costs? Officer response – Wokingham had three or four very complex cases which required court proceedings, which could take over and above the average of 26 weeks. Therefore, some of the children with the associated additional costs were from previous years. There were no outliers within the current projections. This was a demand led service, and it was modelled as best as could be expected, however there were always potential outliers.
- Was there a potential to move into a larger joint legal arrangement with other Local Authorities? Officer response – WBC was part of a group of 6 Local Authorities, which

was run by Reading Borough Council. WBC were exploring other methods of this service provision.

- Was the out of hours service contact meeting the needs of our residents? Executive Member and officer response – Based on data and feedback, the current provision was believed to be sufficient. The contract was based on usage, however costs were not fairly distributed and WBC had a proportionally low usage. The terms of the contract had been renegotiated, and the current terms were now much more favourable for WBC. The £65k cost was related to the renegotiation and the move towards the new terms.
- Would the creation of the planned SEND school in Winnersh transfer into reducing some of the costs of sending children out of Borough? Executive Member response – The provision of a new in-Borough SEND school would help to reduce placement and transport costs, as it was cheaper to send children to local schools within the Borough. It was a desire that every child should be able attend a school close to where they lived.
- Were the growth estimates for home to school transport a worst case scenario? Executive Member and officer response – Children were always entering the Borough, and some children with placements required home to school transport. This service was based on future demand, and the estimates had been based on the most realistic scenario. This was a statutory service, and whatever amount of money that was required to be spent to meet the needs of the service users would be spent, with costs minimised wherever possible.
- Was there a danger that other Local Authorities with Council houses within the Wokingham Borough could place families in said houses, meaning WBC cover the costs of their needs? Officer response – It was very unlikely that our neighbours would be underhanded. WBC worked with its neighbours on a range of issues including family placements, and therefore any placements from one Local Authority to another would be discussed and negotiated.
- Had there been any exploration for other ways to provide the out of hour's service? Officer response – This was a very expensive service to provide on a solo basis, and the current six Local Authority approach was meeting our resident's needs.
- Relating to bid number CS 5, home to school transport, was the reduction in growth in 2023/24 due to children finishing school? Officer response – This reduction was more so due to the proposed new school being built within the Borough. This would be staggered entry, however the needs of individual children must still be met, which could mean that some children would still have to be transported outside of the Borough for their needs to be appropriately met.
- Relating to bid number CS 16, savings within home to school transport, were these savings realistic? Officer response – The savings were twofold, primarily via route optimisation and a dynamic purchasing system. There were a number of changes that would come online around the 2022/23 time period which should lead to the predicted savings levels. The process was now managed more stringently, in addition to having more local provision for children. A dynamic purchasing system ensured that the staff procuring the transport were also bearing the costs.

- Relating to bid CS 15, placements review, would this effect service provision? Officer response – Absolutely not, this was a statutory service and the review was about doing a line by line review of each child to make efficiency saving in the long term where possible. Every child would still be placed in the appropriate setting for their needs.
- Relating to bid CS 17, reconfiguration of Children’s Services, were these savings realistic and achievable? Officer response – This would be the subject of a thorough research project, including looking at other service models. No service reduction would be realised as part of the proposed reconfiguration. It was believed that the service could be reconfigured to deliver efficiencies without any service reduction. All of this work was being conducted early on, so that if savings were realised to not be achievable then the appropriate persons could be alerted early on.
- Was the Local Government Finance Settlement likely to change any of the Children’s Service bids? Executive Member and officer response – As this was a statutory service, it was not a case of cutting service provision. Whilst service efficiencies and best estimates could be worked through, WBC would still have to provide the appropriate level of funding required to deliver this statutory service. There was now assurances from the Service that the existing budgets were built up to the level of where they needed to be, excluding anomalies and unknown placements.
- How had C-19 changed home to school transport assistance? Officer response – Special transport services had to be arranged to deal with this element of the pandemic. Some of these costs were covered by Government grants. There had been no reduction of the service delivery model, and there was now more individual transport in place to ensure class bubbles were maintained. Lessons had been learnt from the pandemic, which had been captured as a part of the recent review.
- Relating to bid CS 8, SEND legal costs, was growth of £100k sufficient given previous overspends? Officer response – Based on current cases and tribunals, the estimated growth was sufficient. The Service tracked children right through the system which gave a good indication of future legal costs. Legal costs had never been budgeted for before, and this was a best estimate based on the current evidence.
- Were the changes and efficiencies within home to school transport on track? Officer response – Yes, there had been a recent review and a consultation was underway, the results of which would be worked on by officers.
- Was there a potential opportunity for staff to be recruited from a larger area, if they could effectively work from home? Officer response – Many Children’s Services staff were on the front line, and therefore needed to live locally to effectively conduct visits. This was however an opportunity that could be realised on an organisational wide basis.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the savings and growth proposals for the Communities, Insight and Change Directorate.

Keeley Klements stated that the land charges were offered at a competitive price, however the marketplace was changing and the current figures were unobtainable, and had been so for the past couple of years. The budget to deal with cases and prevention of domestic abuse had moved from Children’s Services to this directorate. Children’s Services had

done lots of good work in this area, and had identified a budget gap. The growth bid was therefore present to fill this gap for effective service provision. The new Assistant Director role was moving from the Resources & Assets directorate to this directorate, and was therefore a net zero cost. There were some library efficiency savings that were being explored, whilst the focus was to provide a service for when it was most convenient for residents to make use of it.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Communities, Insight and Change, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to bid CIC 33, library service efficiencies, could this be elaborated? Executive Member and officer response – The library service felt that they could purchase books in a more efficient manner, resulting in more optimised prices. C-19 had resulted in virtual libraries being used significantly by our customers, and this was something that could continue to be offered going forward. There were opportunities to use RFI book returns, which would allow for longer opening hours and staffing efficiencies. No opening times would be changed until all research had been completed, and the timings would be optimised for when most people wanted to use the service.
- Relating to bid CIC 1, IT security infrastructure, when was this important work likely to be completed? Officer response – WBC was receiving more and more emails about scams and schemes and other attacks. Officers were working on the new infrastructure right away, and the existing firewall was robust. This additional work was to sustain the firewall and secure WBC against ever more sophisticated attacks. Work would be completed as soon as possible.
- Relating to bid CIC 9, inflationary software licence increases, were there any other increase in the contracts? Officer response – WBC were very strict with our contracts, and many were based on national standards and frameworks. This increase was the only portion of the contract that was increasing.
- Why was the budget relating to allowing WBC to deal with cases and prevention of domestic abuse not sitting under Adult's and Children's Services? Officer response – One of the Lead Specialists was doing a lot of work to do with domestic abuse. The way it was seen in the new model was that there were safeguarding thresholds for Adults and Children, and everything below that is where this service fitted in. This move now brought the antisocial behaviour and community safety partnership agenda altogether, whilst bringing the localities team into the service to help with enforcement and understanding each individual community. This also helped to ease some of the pressures with Children's Services. This solution now allowed for a dedicated resource in this area, and the Service would still work closely with Berkshire Women's Aid.
- Could some rationale be explained related to the year on year growth numbers within the domestic abuse budget? Officer response – This Service was underfunded for some time, and required extra growth to bring the Service to where it needed to be. This was unfortunately an area of growth, and further pressures would be realised as a result of lockdowns due to C-19.
- Would the installation and provision of self-service library machines be explored further? Officer response – There were a number of changes and efficiencies that were being explored, including additional self-service library machines and RFI returnable books. The library app could be used to move towards an almost staff less

library. Any and all changes would only be made after the appropriate consultation had been undertaken to make sure that the service offered was what worked best for our residents.

- Was the funding for the domestic abuse service sufficient? Executive Member response – This service had not been specifically funded before, and strong funding had been provided for this initial change. A wait and see approach was being taken, and if additional funding was required then this could then be provided.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the savings and growth proposals for the Resources and Assets Directorate.

John Kaiser stated that the Youth Offending Service and Family Intervention Resources support team was being provisioned due to the construction of a new road. The additional funding for finance liaison officers would give WBC more control in some statutory areas. Some additional funding for case owners was being provided to ensure that support was available in the right places throughout the Council. There was more demand on the Shared Legal Service, which had been achieving very good results, and this service therefore required additional resource to meet demand. Income would be generated from WBCs commercial property portfolio, with income predicted to ramp up as the Borough and Nation continued to recover from the C-19 pandemic. A slightly more conservative estimate of income generation from Wokingham owned houses had been predicted for the next financial year due to the pandemic. The Council already had solar assets and was looking to expand upon them, and savings bids RA 15 & 16 were to be the result of additional investments and income generation therefrom.

Parry Bath stated that the provision of 3G pitches would provide income all year round, due to their artificial nature. There were a number of new offerings available, such as extra classes and programmes within leisure, which would also generate income for WBC. Some existing offerings within the Leisure portfolio were proposed to have their charges increased, though despite this WBC would still be offering the lowest charges when compared to other Local Authorities.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Resources and Assets, Members raised the following points and queries:

- When would the proposed solar farm be paid off make a financial return? Executive Member and officer response – There was an approximate four year recovery time based on the planned performance of the site. However, the income projections were over and above the capital costs.
- Would solar panels on the roofs of newly built Wokingham owned houses be a pre-requisite? Executive Member response – The absence of solar panels would not stop WBC from delivering affordable homes throughout the Borough, though measures such as this and other carbon offsetting measures would be prioritised wherever possible.
- Would the proposed new solar farms result in cheaper utility bills for residents? Executive Member and officer response – There were lots of ways that the solar farm could help, including powering whole estates. In general, the solar farm would be a credit for the Council Tax payer as a form of income generation.

- Relating to bid RA 2, additional finance liaison officers, could this be elaborated? Executive Member and officer response – This bid would allow for some administrative tasks to be completed more effectively, and there was no reason why these tasks could not be carried out by central WBC staff, leaving specialists in various Services to continue with their work. There had been two reductions in admin staff over two reshuffles in recent times, and this bid was there to help re-resource specific areas, allowing specialists to continue to do specialised work.
- How certain were we that the proposed solar farm and crematorium would be ready in time to meet the income generation projections? Executive Member and officer response – Land ownership relating to the proposed solar farm was not an issue, as WBC had already negotiated with the farmers who did not want to run the sites going forward. A pylon already ran through the middle of the proposed site, which would help significantly with infrastructure. A large number of trees would be planted to form an arboretum which would link up with the proposed crematorium, making both sites attractive in terms of appearance. The sites would also back onto a SANG, and delivery was expected in approximately three years. The figures would be refreshed next year based on updated information.
- Was there statutory provision for possible capital losses relating to WBC's commercial property portfolio? Officer response – This depended on a number of factors, as it was a minimum revenue provision. In the private sector, this could be described as depreciation which was effectively recognising loss of the value of assets, whereas in the public sector this was seen as the repayment of a debt. The debt has to be repaid over time, and therefore if there was an impairment of an asset then the debt would be reduced alongside this.
- Were we confident in achieving the £960k return from the commercial property portfolio? Officer response – Yes, the policy was to achieve a 2% target over and above the cost of borrowing, which would be achieved based on the current information. £200m was borrowed, as agreed by the Executive, and the income generation did not assume any additional borrowing above this figure.
- Relating to bid RA 16, the proposed solar farm, were these income generation predictions realistic? Executive Member and officer response – This project was led by the WBC energy specialist, and he had commissioned this work with experts who had carried out similar schemes across the country. Based on this, the figures as presented were achievable.
- Relating to bid RA 15, the proposed crematorium, were the projected income figures net after the cost of construction? Executive Member response – Yes, this was the operating profit after WBC had paid the interest on the funds and borrowing.
- Relating to RA 18, the early repayment programme, was this a programme for people who were paying WBC? Executive Member and officer response – This was about WBC making secure and streamlined payments across the organisation to our variety of suppliers, allowing better financial management arrangements. It will also enable WBC to make the best of our cash flow position, to negotiate better terms with suppliers who appreciated very quick cash payments. An action was taken for Graham Ebers to provide information as to how much the company providing this service would make out of this arrangement.

- Relating to savings bid RA 14, Cantley Park enhancement, how much would this cost over the following years? Executive Member and officer response – The figures shown were the net incomes, and the full details were laid out within the Executive report which was presented roughly a year ago. Approximately £700k was provided as a grant from the Football Association, and some ring-fenced S106 funding was also used. These figures were income over and above any financing costs of any residual borrowing.
- Regarding income from leisure services, when were we presuming that facilities would reopen? Officer response – Services were currently being offered in an online and virtual format, and WBC were predicting that a more substantial “normal” offering could be seen in April 2021.
- Relating to savings bid 24, review of fees and charges for leisure services outside of the main contract, was a thirty percent increase appropriate? Executive Member and officer response – WBC’s offerings were still lower than other Local Authorities, even after the proposed increases. The new prices would be approximately £4.42 a session compared to prices ranging from £5 to £6 at other Local Authorities. These services had been operating for a long time and were very popular. The increase of thirty percent was not ideal, however there came a time when prices had to rise for the service to be delivered effectively.
- Were any other grants expected from the Government related to closure of facilities as a result of C-19? Officer response – Officers were waiting to see if WBC would be reimbursed for closure of leisure facilities as a result of C-19.
- Had the potential loss of customers who could no longer afford sessions at a thirty percent increase been factored into income gains? Executive Member and officer response – This was a hugely popular service with a long waiting list, and the user base was largely resilient to the effects of C-19 as they were receiving pensions rather than salaries.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Ullakarin Clark ,Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Parry Batth, Carol Cammiss, Graham Ebers, and Keeley Clements be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Information as to how much the company providing the early repayment service would make out of this arrangement be provided to Committee Members;
- 3) Special items, updated revenue bids, and capital bids be considered by the Committee at a later date.

55. UPCOMING MEETINGS' WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the upcoming meetings’ work programme, set out in agenda pages 69 to 70.

The Committee were advised that returning items including the burial grounds review, and the BAME Forum would look to be scheduled for either the January or March Committee meeting, whichever was more appropriate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The upcoming meetings' work programme be noted;
- 2) Returning items including the burial grounds review, and the BAME Forum would look to be scheduled for either the January or March Committee meeting, whichever was more appropriate.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 23 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Also Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Helen Thompson, Ernst and Young
Carol Cammiss, Director Children's Services
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Bob Watson, Head of Finance
Julie Barker, Senior Specialist Audit & Investigations
Catherine Hickman, Head of Audit & Investigations

25. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

26. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at the next available opportunity.

Councillor Burgess questioned when Members would see the survey on the effectiveness of the Audit Committee. It was explained that the CIPFA guidance that would be worked to, had been delayed, but a survey would be produced shortly.

27. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

30. UPDATE ON STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee received an update on the Statement of Accounts.

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

- The Head of Finance commented that it had originally been envisaged that the Statement of Accounts would have been presented to the Committee for signature. However, they were delayed, as there were delays with the audit of the Berkshire Pension Fund. The delay on the audit opinion on the Pension Fund did not allow Ernst & Young to provide an audit opinion whilst an item on the Pension Fund remained outstanding.
- It was proposed that the Statement of Accounts be taken to the February Committee meeting. The Annual Governance Statement would be part of the Statement of Accounts.

- Councillor Gee commented that previously it had been indicated that extra work would need to be carried out around the value of property investments, given the uncertain market. She sought an update on whether this had been done after 31 March. The Head of Finance indicated that a review of valuations had been carried out to assess the impact on Covid. Anything post 31 March was a post balance sheet event. The Finance team were working with Ernst & Young on the matter.
- Councillor Ross questioned whether the delay was likely to be an annual occurrence. The Head of Finance hoped not and agreed that the situation was frustrating. The Section 151 Officer had taken the matter back to the Berkshire Treasurers. He felt that it not necessarily governance issues and additional assurance was being sorted.
- Helen Thompson stated that Deloitte, the auditors of the Pension Fund, had indicated that they had hoped to provide the relevant information by early October. However, this had been dependent on them receiving information from the Pension Fund and other third parties. It was believed that there had a delay in the provision of this information. It had been a challenging year for the auditors, however she understood Members' frustrations. Deloitte had been clearer on when work was likely to be completed which had meant that Ernst & Young and the Council had been better able to plan.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Statement of Accounts be noted.

31. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT COMMITTEE - AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received the Wokingham Borough Council – Audit Progress Report.

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

- The delay from Deloitte had impacted on the completion of the audit. Deloitte would go back to complete the audit on the Pension Fund in early December. It was possible that the February Audit Committee would need to be moved later in the month as a result.
- There were two areas where Covid had particularly impacted on the audit process;
 - Valuations – where the valuers for the Council had included a material uncertainty that was linked to Covid 19 within their valuation report. That particularly impacted those properties that were either valued at fair value or at a market value. Ernst & Young had taken the approach that where there were assets that were valued at fair or market value and were material, there was a need to make use of the valuation specialists. This team had been particularly under pressure.
 - Going concern and disclosures around that – to ensure that disclosures around going concern stated the basis for preparation for the change in auditing standards that were coming in for 2022. This year was currently a bridging period.
- Working remotely and in different ways had been a challenge.
- With regards to the audit, two split visits had been carried out to date. Some work had been carried out in August and also in September/early October. Ernst & Young were due to visit again in the week beginning 30 November and had had a meeting with the Finance team regarding progress.
- Councillor Burgess sought further information on the valuation process. Helen Thompson explained that the material uncertainty clause was a cover for the valuers to be clear that whatever value they placed in their reports, may be

impacted by Covid. Whilst it was a general caveat that had been included, it was most applicable to those properties valued at either fair value or market value. A sample of assets would be selected to carry out a more detailed review. Ernst & Young had been required to use specialists for this work due to the level of uncertainty. The valuers would come to a potential range for an asset, and if the value that the Council's valuer had concluded fell within that range based on the same data, there was not an issue.

- Councillor Burgess questioned whether there had been discussions on going concern, and what key issues might be for going concern. She was informed that the going concerns assessment needed to cover a period of 12 months from the date of the signing of the Statement of Accounts so management had not yet been asked to undertake detailed assessments for areas of going concern.
- Councillor Gee asked what was meant by REFCUS and was informed that it was revenue expenditure funded from capital under statute. The Head of Finance explained that in certain limited circumstances capital money could be used to fund revenue expenditure. Councillor Gee asked whether this had been implemented this year. Helen Thompson indicated that she would report back once the audit work had been completed.
- With regards to going concern, Councillor Gee asked that if councils were unable to go bust, why whether the Council was a going concern, was considered. Helen Thompson referred to councils with significant exposure to particular commercial investment (e.g. Luton Council owned Luton Airport) and the fact that they would need to consider whether they had resources to continue to hold the asset. Councils could have going concern due to exposure to challenging circumstances or because they had run out of reserves. Croydon Council had issued a S114 notice and were now only going to deliver statutory services. Going concern was one of the auditing standards. The Head of Finance reminded Members that there were consequences to Councils that issued S114 notices.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Council – Audit Progress Report be noted.

32. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID - YEAR REPORT 2020-21

The Committee considered the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2020-21.

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

- It was one of three treasury management reports which went through Audit Committee and on to Council, the others being the Outturn Report and the Treasury Management Strategy.
- The format of the report had been changed to make it more readable and accessible.
- The statutory prudential indicators had not been breached.
- The Chief Financial Officer had asked that the report demonstrated that the Council was on a secure financial footing.
- The report demonstrated the level of debt that the Council held in terms of its overall internal and external debt, and the amount of that debt that was not funded by invest to save schemes or the income lines coming through the Council's development programmes.
- The cost that the council taxpayer had to fund was £7.52 for an average Band D property. He explained how this figure was reached.
- The debt financing costs in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan were £7.8m.
- Net indebtedness after cash balances was £83m at end of September.

- The Government had provided some funding throughout the year to assist with cash flow, because of the pandemic.
- The amount of debt taken on board and investment balances had increased. Most of the money in the cash investments balances was a short-term hold based on the Council's cash flow expectations.
- Operational boundaries for debt and permitted debt levels had not been breached. The Council had tried to convert a certain amount of internal borrowing to external borrowing ratio to what was recognised as an industry standard rate. More debt had been taken on, but historically the Council had been under borrowed.
- Councillor Sargeant commented that the report was much clearer.
- Councillor Burgess commented that the Audit Committee was not a means of political point scoring and provided independent assurance. She went on to ask whether the presentation of the cost of financing debt and the net position had changed from previous years. The Head of Finance stated that the presentation had changed. It represented that not all of the £7.8m gross figure was funded by council tax income, being mostly funded through other income streams from the commercial investments and the treasury investments, and invests to save.
- Councillor Burgess commented that the presentation of the net indebtedness had changed and asked whether the Covid funding would be time limited or spent in the near future, meaning that the net indebtedness would rise. The Head of Finance indicated that the Government had given certain leeway as a result of Covid such as not having to pay all the business rates on a monthly basis. The indebtedness levels would decrease and more detail would be provided in the Outturn report.
- Councillor Burgess noted that the Value of Realisable Assets ratio to External Borrowing was 1.53:1, and asked the Head of Finance if he was comfortable with this level and what the lowest rate was that he would allow. The Head of Finance indicated that he was comfortable with 1.53:1.
- Councillor Shepard-DuBey stated that the loans had not been included in the Housing Revenue Account, and questioned how much a council tenant living in a Band D property would be paying. The Head of Finance indicated that there was no distinction because the council tax base was assessed in the same way and that it would be £7.52. Loans around the HRA were ring-fenced. He would provide further information on the HRA.
- Councillor Shepherd-Dubey questioned how interest that was charged on internal borrowing was reflected. The Head of Finance emphasised that the opportunity cost around internal borrowing was currently very low.
- Councillor Gee asked why it was reasonable to show the financing cost offset against the General Fund, if borrowing was not undertaken for particular investments. The Head of Finance emphasised that it depended on cash balances.
- In response to a question from Councillor Gee regarding realisable assets, the Head of Finance explained that the Council had a form of asset cover for the level of indebtedness that it held.
- Councillor Gee stated that in last year's report, the cost of debt financing was similar to this year, £7.4m was the budget and £7.3m was the forecast. However, the return on investment last year was only £3.5m-£4m. She asked what had been offset this year that did not appear in the treasury management report last year. The Head of Finance agreed to check and feedback to the Committee.
- Councillor Gee commented that it was difficult to compare reports following the change in presentation.

- With regards to net indebtedness, Councillor Gee asked why the particular ratio had been selected and was informed that it demonstrated the Council had sufficient cover for the assets that it held in the balance sheet and the true level of debt.
- Councillor Burgess stated that borrowing was going to increase and including internal and external borrowing from reserves, this would go up to almost £700m in 2022/23. She asked what impact the effect of Covid would have on the timing of this debt reducing. The Head of Finance emphasised that the Council would remain within its levels for debt. It was likely that the peak debt would be moved later due to Covid as would the time of repayment. The pace of recovery of the country would have an impact.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee:

- 1) support this report and recommend it to Executive.
- 2) note all approved indicators set out in the treasury management strategy have been adhered to and that prudent and safe management has been maintained.
- 3) note that the net cost per council tax payer for the financing of all borrowing to date equates to £7.52 which is 0.4% of the average Band D council tax charge.
- 4) note that the total external general fund debt is £324m, which reduces to £83m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness).
- 5) note the Council's realisable asset value of £496m, of which its commercial assets is estimated at £192m.

33. CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered a report on Corporate Risk Management.

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

- There had not been any significant changes to the Corporate Risk Register since the last iteration. Some additional governance measures had been added to a number of risks.
- The Director Children's Services provided an update about Children's Services. The fact that the full impact of Covid was not known was a concern. Children would potentially be one of the last to be impacted in terms of their development and pressures on family life. Consideration had to be given to how the Children's Services offered in the future, was shaped.
- Staff in the service had done a great job during the pandemic. As many face to face visits as could be carried out safely, including 100% of child protection visits, had been carried out during the first lockdown. Services had continued to be delivered, some of this remotely. Some parents had found the process of undertaking child protection conferences remotely, less stressful. Attendance at multi agency meetings had improved as people did not have to travel to attend.
- Progress was been made about SEN and an SEN improvement plan was being developed. A Quality Assurance system and auditing programme had also been developed.
- Members were informed that Ofsted had made changes to the regulatory framework. It was likely that the Council would receive a safeguarding during Covid, visit, during early spring.

- Councillor Soane commented that home schooled children often undertook activities outside school in order to socialise, many of which had been unable to be carried out during the pandemic. He questioned the impact on the children's mental health and how any issues were being addressed. The Director Children's Services indicated that the Council was working with the voluntary sector where it could to support activities when appropriate. The Council did assess elective home education offered to determine that a well-rounded education was being provided. However, this was a voluntary process and parents had to agree to a local authority assessment.
- Councillor Burgess asked how the safeguarding risk was being mitigated against, and noted that there had been an increase in reports of domestic abuse. The Director Children's Services commented that there had been an increase in the visibility in the community about being responsible and looking out for domestic abuse. Thames Valley Police had carried out a door knock of families known to be at risk, in a sensitive manner. The position of Domestic Abuse worker for Children had been advertised and would sit in Children's Services. In addition, Children's Services were funding a worker within the Berkshire Women's Aid.
- Mental health support teams in schools would going fully live in the new year. A therapies in schools service was being also being developed.
- With regards to children with autism or who used sign language, or required additional educational support, Councillor Shepard-DuBey asked how this had been managed during the pandemic. She was informed that teaching assistants had been provided with the relevant PPE to support working in close proximity with children with SEN.
- Respite centres had been kept open during the pandemic.
- Councillor Shepard-DuBey commented that a number of children had had to socially isolate due to classmates having symptoms of Covid. Those who did not have computers at home had been potentially disadvantaged. The Director Children's Services emphasised that schools were now set up for this situation and had contingency plans in place. If a child had to self-isolate and did not have access to a computer at home, it was for the school to provide one temporarily. Members were asked to inform her if they were aware of cases where this had not been the case.
- Councillor Shepard-DuBey questioned whether SEND transport was still being paid and was informed that it was. The appropriate guidance was being followed.
- With regards to the SEN team, Councillor Gee asked about staff morale and if there was sufficient permanence within the team to deliver the service. The Director Children's Services stated that this was a very difficult area to recruit to and to access high quality staff. She felt that there was a difference between stability and permanence. The team was stable and included some SEN locums. Councillor Gee asked whether any of the locums would be put on to permanent contracts. The Director Children's Services advised that this would be offered where appropriate.
- Councillor Burgess referred to the Climate Emergency risk and stated that the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group had indicated that the Climate Emergency Action Plan needed further work. A 6 monthly update had been agreed but had not been taken forwards. The Assistant Director Governance agreed to feed back the comments made. An Internal Audit of the Climate Emergency project would be undertaken.
- Councillor Burgess asked what would be the main actions to reduce the financial risk. The Head of Finance indicated that it could not be mitigated entirely as some

factors such as the amount of government funding received, was outside of the Council's control.

- Councillor Burgess asked that the Brexit risk register be circulated to the Committee.
- The Assistant Director Governance commented that he had no further update to give in relation to the housing risk.
- Councillor Burgess commented that it had been agreed that the wording of the equalities risk would be amended to highlight the Covid related risks to this area.

RESOLVED: That the risks and mitigating actions of the Council's corporate risks as detailed in the Corporate Risk Register be considered and noted.

34. 2020/21 INTERNAL AUDIT & INVESTIGATIONS - QUARTER 2 PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received the 2020/21 Internal Audit and Investigations – Quarter 2 Progress Report.

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

- The Committee had received the annual report at the previous meeting.
- The Assistant Director Governance introduced the Senior Specialist – Audit and Investigations and the Head of Audit and Investigation. The Senior Specialist had undertaken the follow up work on the equalities and Public Health audits.
- The Head of Audit and Investigations indicated that the report highlighted progress up to September. There had been a need to refocus the audit work due to Covid as there had been some vacancies within the team and also some of the team had been redeployed. The Head of Audit and Investigations was confident that the team would be in a position to provide an audit opinion.
- The Public Health and Equalities audits had improved to Category 2.
- Councillor Gee felt that the layout of the report was confusing. She questioned what 'H, M and L' meant. The Lead Specialist – Audit and Investigations indicated that it stood for high, medium or low levels of concerns.
- Councillor Gee commented that it would be helpful to have more detail around the areas of concerns. The Senior Specialist – Audit and Investigations offered to provide a summary with regards to the Public Health and Equalities audits. Future reports could contain an appendix of findings.
- Councillor Burgess stated that it would be helpful to have more information on high risks and what actions had been taken.

RESOLVED: That the 2020/21 Internal Audit and Investigation Quarter 2 Progress Report be noted.

35. FORWARD PROGRAMME

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

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

- Helen Thompson indicated the Audit Plan 2020/21 would not be ready for the next meeting.
- The Head of Finance emphasised that the Annual Governance Statement would form part of the Statement of Accounts.

- **RESOLVED:** That the forward programme be noted.

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Prue Bray and Parry Batth

Officers Present

Peter Baveystock, Consultant Specialist, Place Clienting
Richard Bisset, Lead Specialist, Place Clienting
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Louise Griffin, Performance and Programme Management Specialist
Irum Gulzar, Waste Collection and Disposal Contract Manager
Clare Lawrence, Assistant Director, Place Services
Emma Pilgrim, Project Management Officer, Place Clienting
Chris Traill, Director of Place and Growth

50. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Sarah Kerr.

Prue Bray attended the meeting as a substitute.

51. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a future date.

52. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

53. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

54. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

55. GRASS CUTTING DELIVERY REVIEW 2020

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 15 to 20, which gave details of a review of the 2020/21 Grounds Maintenance service/contract.

Emma Pilgrim, Project Management Officer, Place Clienting, attended the meeting to introduce the report and answer Member questions.

The report reminded Members that the current contract had commenced in 2016 with a new contractor, ISS Facility Services. The contract was subsequently bought out by Tivoli Group Ltd in June 2018.

The Committee had carried out a Scrutiny review of the contract in 2018 following a significant number of issues in 2016 and 2018. Following the review, a number of improvements had been introduced in 2019. The Committee asked for further a progress report relating to the operation of the contract in 2020.

The report stated that Covid-19 had had an impact on frontline service delivery. However, Tivoli had continued to deliver grounds maintenance services whilst ensuring the safety of staff. As a result of staff shortages at Tivoli, grass cutting ran up to four weeks behind schedule at times. Tivoli agreed additional overtime working for staff and focussed resources to ensure that the larger public open spaces were not affected.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

What lessons had been learned in relation to the recruitment and retention of staff to support the grass cutting service? It was confirmed that the nature of the industry led to a number of experienced staff supplemented by seasonal staff during the summer months. The Council was supporting Tivoli in a bid to use the Government Kickstart scheme to attract young people. Officers were also exploring the potential for apprenticeships.

What sort of mitigation measures were used to support the delivery of the service during 2020? An example was given relating to the use of equipment from the Countryside Service to provide additional capacity during busy periods.

The scheduled grass cutting programme did run into problems during the 2020 season. Dry weather during May helped to curtail grass growth which helped the contractor.

The weekly Member Update was helpful, but was not produced on a regular basis in 2020. It was confirmed that the update would be circulated on a more consistent basis in 2021.

Would there be improved communications about the wildflower/meadow areas which were developed as part of the contract? It was confirmed that the potential for putting information on the WBC website would be explored. The wildflower/meadow areas were situated in the larger areas of open space, such as Cantley Park.

How effective was the online complaints process relating to grass cutting? It was confirmed that the system was working well. It was important to produce effective communications to ensure that residents were using the system correctly. Work was ongoing to improve online access and publicity.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Emma Pilgrim be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the update report on grass cutting for 2020/21 be noted.

56. FOOD WASTE SERVICE REVIEW 2019-20

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 21 to 26, which gave details of a review of the food waste collection service in 2019/20.

Irum Gulzar, Waste Collection and Disposal Contract Manager, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Council had extended its waste collection contract with Veolia in April 2019. The extension included the addition of a weekly food waste collection service across the Borough. The new arrangements aimed to divert 5,000 tonnes of food waste from the blue bags and contribute 7% towards the recycling target of 50% by 2020.

The food waste collection service had now been operating for 19 months. To date, the service had received a positive response from residents. By April 2020 the Council achieved a 50% recycling rate. In 2019/20 the Council diverted 5,154 tonnes of food waste from blue bags, exceeding the target of 5,000 tonnes. This tonnage also delivered a reduction of 52k tonnes of CO₂e which supported the Council's climate emergency work.

The report stated that, overall, the performance of the food waste collection service had improved significantly, with engagement from an increasing number of residents. There was a commitment to increase participation further, but also to focus on waste minimisation in 2021/22 to further increase recycling and reduce the costs of disposal.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

What was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the service? It was confirmed that, as a result of the pandemic, more people had spent more time at home. This had resulted in increased tonnages of waste, including food waste. There were further issues around the closure of WBC outlets for bags and the closure of the waste and recycling sites. An updated list of outlets was maintained on the WBC website. In the meantime, as a temporary measure, ABC cars were being used to deliver to people who were unable to leave home.

Some Councils had started food waste collection well then seen a fall-off in numbers. It was confirmed that the aim was to achieve 75% participation in the scheme in 2021/22. Focussed communications would be aimed at areas of the Borough with lower participation rates.

The table on Page 26 of the Agenda indicated that food waste had made a contribution of 7% to the overall recycling target.

For families who did not use the food waste caddies (e.g. home composters) did WBC aim to retrieve the unused caddies? It was confirmed that this suggestion would be investigated.

On a related issue, what was the timeframe for the delivery of the new recycling sacks? It was confirmed that the sacks were being produced overseas and that the pandemic had impacted on delivery dates. It was hoped that the new sacks would be delivered to residents early in 2021. Members would be notified of the timeframe for delivery of the new sacks and the plans to deal with the current black boxes.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Irum Gulzar be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) The update on the food waste collection service be noted.

57. STREET CLEANSING REVIEW 2020-21

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 27 to 44, which gave details of a review of the work of the newly appointed street cleansing contractor (Urbasser) for 2020/21 to date.

Peter Baveystock, Consultant Specialist, Place and Clienting, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report set out details of the overall performance of the contract which delivered street sweeping, litter picking, fly-tip removal, herbicide treatments, graffiti removal and litter bin emptying. The report included details of the key performance indicators for the service and performance levels for the period April – October 2020. Two of the KPIs, sweeping and litter picking on schedule and removal of fly tipping, had not met the target, largely as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The impacts included the closure of the household waste and recycling sites, increased usage/littering on public open spaces and an increase in glass taken to recycling sites (due to the closure of pubs).

The report stated that, in order to drive efficiencies discussions would be held with the contractor about moving to an output-based service, allowing resources to be concentrated on areas of greatest need. A partnership approach was also being developed to tackle areas of footway encroachment.

In the ensuing discussion, Members made the following points:

The report referred to sweeping and litter picking to Grade 'A' – what was the definition of Grade 'A'? It was confirmed that Grade A resulted in a situation with no remaining litter or detritus. If residents were dissatisfied with the sweeping and litter picking standards being achieved, it was important to report any issues to WBC. This would enable remedial action to be taken in line with the contract. Similarly, if the contractors did not appear in line with the published schedules, this should be reported using the HIMs system.

In relation to bins, was there a process for redeploying under-utilised bins to areas with greater demand? It was confirmed that there were currently 1,250 litter bins in use across the Borough. Any concerns about bin placement would be reviewed. The first issue to be considered in these cases was: Is there a litter problem in the vicinity?

In relation to fly-tipping, was it possible to report fly-tipping on areas away from roads, for example on bridleways and public footpaths? It was confirmed that this would be investigated and confirmed. Paul Fishwick confirmed that he had used the HIMS system to identify fly-tipping away from the road network.

Whilst there was data on the number of fly-tips and fixed penalty notices (45 since April 2020) was there data on the number of prosecutions and the outcomes? Parry Batth confirmed that there was a cross-party working group which was currently looking at a range of issues around fly-tipping. This included the scope for the use of bigger fines – the maximum penalty stood at a £50k fine or two years in prison.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Peter Baveystock be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;

- 2) the update report on the performance of the street cleansing contract during 2020/21, be noted.

58. QUARTER 2 2020/21 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 45 to 80, which provided the Quarter 2 2020/21 Performance Monitoring Report (July – September 2020).

Louise Griffin, Performance and Programme Management Specialist, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that 39 (63%) of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were on track for delivery and were reported Green; 11 KPIs (18%) were off-target and were reported as Amber; 10 KPIs (16%) were reported as Red as the target was not achieved in Q2.

The report stated that, despite the significant impact of Covid-19, performance at the end of Q2 had remained positive across the majority of KPIs. However, the impact of the pandemic had resulted in fewer KPIs, overall, being on track compared with Q1.

During the discussion on the report, Members made the following points:

- The Q2 report covered July – September 2020, but was being considered at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 25 November 2020. Was it possible to submit the report in a more timely manner to ensure that the data considered by Members was up to date?
- RA5a - Successful homeless preventions – the information stated that there were 12 households, whose prevention duty ended in Q2. Eight of these cases ended successfully with accommodation being secured for six plus months. What happened to the other four cases?
- PG26 - Air quality – Twyford data should be available for 2018 and the M4 was closed for some time period due to highways work, so this needed to be taken into account.
- PG16 - Greenways and cycleways - Members pointed out some errors in the narrative – Cantley work Section 1 route B – work commences in Dec 2020 (not 2021) and completion of Section 3 is June 2021, so out of the target date or included in the 3km target?
- AS9 - Permanent admissions to residential and nursing care homes:
 - How have admissions changed compared to pre-pandemic rates?
 - Does the target change based on the level of admissions?
 - What are the costs likely to be recoverable from the Government due to Covid-19?
 - Why has there been an increase? Members expected a decrease due to Covid-19? (The report in fact showed that there had been a fall in admissions).
 - What was the cost incurred and how do we measure this change in demand due to Covid-19 and its impact?
- RA7 - Revenue budget monitoring – Members were pleased to see that Covid-19 spend was incorporated into the reporting. What were the timescales for recovering costs from the Government?
- PG3 - Local Plan Update:

- How do we decide whether the Local Plan Update is on track - are we setting SMART targets/tolerances?
- What is the target completion date for the Local Plan Update and has this changed?
- KPIs in development – Members would like an update on timescales for finalising these indicators, particularly the indicator to measure staff satisfaction.
- CIC1 - Recorded crime – Members had received a presentation from Thames Valley Police (TVP) showing that crime levels had deteriorated during the first lockdown. The Performance Monitoring report showed a rise. Louise Griffin explained that it could be that we were reporting data up to September 2020 but TVP would be able to share up to October/November.
- PG12 - Average daily traffic flow – this PI was measured annually – did officers have an indication locally of the impact of Covid-19 on traffic flows across the Borough.
- Report Appendix – the order of the tables was confusing. In the Appendix, dates from top to bottom were listed in ascending order. In the cover report the tables listed Q2 at the top and Q1 below. A more consistent layout was requested.
- PG1 – S106 allocations – it was advised that allocations may have decreased due to developers holding onto CIL. Members asked what affect this was having.
- PG6 – affordable dwellings – how had this been affected by Covid-19? Louise Griffin stated that the majority of completions were usually planned in Q3 and Q4 and that much of the planned completions were in 2019/20 so we were expecting less this year. It was felt that construction work was ongoing but Members would like to know how this was affected by Covid-19.
- CIC13 – Percentage of calls answered - Members felt that this percentage KPI gave a misleading indication of how WBC was responding to calls. Members would like to see two additional measures reported in future:
 - Time it takes to answer calls (previously three rings);
 - Number of calls dropped/abandoned;
 - Member referred to the message on the phone about using the website as residents were calling because they could not complete the action online;
 - The indicator may be giving a misleading impression of calls and how WBC was responding and dealing with demand;
 - It was confirmed that a corporate review of call handling/customer service was ongoing;
 - Members requested an update on the future plans and progress with the review.
- PG13 – Proportion of highway schemes on track for delivery. Members questioned whether officers were reporting the RAG rating based on original timescales set or whether this is based on changing timescales. For example, some schemes were 6-10 years delayed (from original estimates). How have dates and targets been changed?

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Louise Griffin be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the Q2 2020/21 Performance Monitoring report be noted:

- 3) Members receive further information on the KPI queries raised (as set out above);
- 4) in relation to KPI CIC 13 – Percentage of calls answered – two additional indicators be recommended for inclusion in future reports:
 - Time taken to answer calls (previously three rings);
 - Number of calls dropped/abandoned.

59. WBC RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 81 to 106, which gave details of the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees' review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report stated that, at its meeting on 24 June 2020, the Committee had considered a report from the Chief Executive which gave details of the Council's initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report stated that the Council played a key role in tackling the pandemic in areas such as health and social care (for example by supporting vulnerable people and local care homes), Children's Services (by safeguarding vulnerable children and supporting home learning) and the provision of advice and support for local businesses.

Whilst the Council's response to the pandemic continued throughout the summer, with a significant workload for officers, the reduction in community transmission and loosening of some lockdown measures provided an opportunity to take stock, assess the scale of the challenge and the way in which the Council had worked with a range of partners.

The report summarised the Council's emergency planning arrangements and detailed the way the Council mobilised resources in conjunction with other key players such as health, police, community and voluntary sector and the Town and Parish Councils.

The Committee asked each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to look at key themes relating to the Council's response and to report back on their findings. The report brought those findings together in a draft composite report for discussion and amendment by the Committee, to be followed by submission of the report to the Council's Executive in January 2021.

The key themes under review comprised the impact of the pandemic on:

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

The composite report stated that the Scrutiny reviews indicated that the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to date, had been very positive. The Council's emergency planning systems were effective, enabling decisive and speedy action on specific issues such as PPE, the risks to residents of local care homes and the establishment of the One Front Door community response. The Council's willingness to work in partnership had also been outstanding, as was the response from community and voluntary organisations across the Borough, along with hundreds of community volunteers. This strengthened partnership approach provided a strong base upon which to build relationships and respond to future challenges, during and after the pandemic. Members also commended the dedication and flexibility of Council staff, many of whom had been redeployed into different roles in order to support the community response.

The recommendations in the composite report reflected the decisions already taken by the Committee as part of its consideration of a number of themes relating to the pandemic. Members considered the composite report and made amendments to the original recommendations in addition to new recommendations.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Executive notes the outstanding response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Borough to date and commends the efforts of staff, Members, partners and community volunteers;
- 2) the Executive advise local care homes to review risk assessments and ensure, for the duration of the pandemic, that:
 - staff do not work in more than one setting, with the exception of workers with specific skill sets, such as prescribing or issuing medication;
 - appropriate social distancing applies for people who work in or visit their homes;
- 3) the Executive highlight the importance of supporting all aspects of WBC staff welfare as the Council enters into the next phase of the pandemic;
- 4) the Executive address the relative sparsity of data on domestic violence and abuse and emphasise the need for explicit recognition and action in response to reported rising levels during the pandemic;
- 5) the Council, in view of the multi-dimensional nature of "poverty", in all discussions, data, policy and action, focus on all who are suffering different types of rising and significant levels of hardship;
- 6) the Executive urgently re-examines the issue of 21 to 25 year old care leavers paying Council Tax, for the remainder of this financial year;
- 7) the Council commits to co-produce an anti-poverty strategy;
- 8) the Council limit the use of comparative data and benchmarking narrative, such as being ranked the least deprived upper tier authority, when talking about poverty, to avoid minimising the difficulties faced by residents;

- 9) the Council continues to focus on the specific impacts of Covid-19 on different community groups and to tailor its communication and engagement activities accordingly;
- 10) the Executive notes the results of the Covid-19 Residents' Survey which indicated that 96% of respondents were either very satisfied, satisfied or had no opinion on the Council's response and set out residents' views on future priorities for the Council:
 - supporting local businesses and employment;
 - supporting mental health;
 - reducing social isolation and loneliness in vulnerable people.

60. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 107 to 110. Members considered any potential issues for inclusion in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

61. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward Work Programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out on Agenda pages 111 to 120.

Alison Swaddle gave updates on the Children's services Work Programme. This included a report to the January 2021 meeting from Public Health England on mental health.

Guy Grandison reported that the December meeting of Community and Corporate O&S would consider items on the 2021 elections and proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

Neil Carr reported that two items would be added to the Management Committee's Work Programme following the review of the Council's response to the pandemic:

- development of the WBC co-produced anti-poverty strategy;
- partnership working with charities and other organisations tackling poverty.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programmes, as amended, be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Chris Bowring
Gary Cowan
Andy Croy
Lindsay Ferris
David Hare
Tahir Maher
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

44. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Charlotte Haitham-Taylor.

45. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

46. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

47. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted.

48. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

I have been immensely proud to lead the Council during this period of emergency. The residents have reacted to this pandemic in a responsible and cooperative manner. The staff have shown strong commitment, innovation and flexibility. Thank you all.

We have sought to steer the Borough through very stormy waters with a firm and steady hand and I am pleased to say that generally we have been successful.

We had the first outbreak of Coronavirus nine months ago. Since lockdown a month ago cases in Wokingham have been falling and are currently 109.3 having risen to 155 at peak.

It is clearly disappointing to find ourselves in Tier Two, but that is because that the tiering is harsher than it was and that we have been grouped with the rest of Berkshire excluding Slough. Our policy is to ensure that as far we are able to return to Tier One. We believe that Tier One gives our businesses the best chance to recover and allows for our residents to lead as full a life as possible. The first review will be on December 16th and is based upon a number of factors; but regrettably it is not negotiable.

Since my last statement, two great British institutions Astra Zeneca and Oxford University have announced an effective vaccine awaiting approval by the regulator. Today I read that Sanofi, Translate Bio and GSK are coming into the frame, together with the Pfizer, and Moderna. We can now be reasonably confident that the light at the end of the tunnel is real.

I appreciate that everyone is tired, and it has been going on for some time, but sadly it will go on for much longer. Whilst the vaccines are excellent news, it will take some six months before they are universal, though benefits will be felt quite quickly as the elderly, the vulnerable, care homes and health staff are vaccinated. So, we as a Borough and Borough Council are planning for the winter and spring, in the hope that next summer we will return to normal; if we remember what that is.

We understand that health staff, over eighties and vulnerable groups may be inoculated as soon as this year.

Coronavirus is transmitted by contact or near contact. If we can inculcate a permanent behavioural change we can have a low rate of infection. Your Council is doing what is within its power to do so together with its partners; care homes, schools, businesses, marshals and community champions.

Our trace system is now working well and we will be rolling out in the New Year more universal testing.

Our primary task is now to ensure that every resident is safe, secure and not isolated throughout the winter. Everyone should have a warm home, food and the medicines. This administration is proud the homeless in the Borough are now very low and all homeless are looked after. We have housed all the rough sleepers except for one who insists that he prefers not to be housed. We will do the same with food and fuel poverty.

It is extremely important throughout this emergency that our residents have confidence in the Council. Statements that there are “6,300 children in poverty and rising” and that there are “one in six children living in poverty” in the Borough we do not believe to be accurate or responsible. Having said that, one vulnerable person, child or family is too much.

Next week in the Extraordinary Executive, we will be agreeing the additional financial help that we are giving families and businesses.

Similarly residents can have confidence that our Council’s finances are in extremely good health, despite the huge recent financial challenges we have faced as a result of Covid. These challenges have precipitated claims of insolvency, draconian service and staff cuts in other local authorities; there have been none here.

The only time in the Borough’s history that there has been a financial crisis was the period of control of the Lib Dems. We had perilous balances at only £2.3m, an uncontrolled overspend of £1.0m and had to act quickly to arrest a genuine fatal decline into insolvency,

Eighteen years of responsible leadership has, amongst other things, been devoted to restoring, maintaining and enhancing the Council’s wellbeing. This has entailed replenishing balances to a safe level of approximately £10m, delivering efficiencies of many millions of pounds year on year, generating new income sources through our

commercially minded activities, whilst investing at an unprecedented level in key priorities such as highways, affordable housing and climate change.

We were financially strong and resilient coming into this emergency, despite years of austerity, in which we faced continuously escalating statutory care costs and severe restrictions in Government funding. It is this financial resilience that has enabled us to step up in the ways that we have needed for our community throughout the pandemic.

Our real terms cost of delivering services has reduced by 31% since 2011, primarily as a result of continuous improvement, giving savings of over £22m during the last five years on a net service budget of approximately £130m with very little that amounts to service cuts. Indeed, we have expanded services including waste collection and libraries, whilst other authorities have been pairing these back.

For the last five years our balances have held at approximately £9-10m. We are the lowest funded unitary authority at £84 per person whilst other authorities receive as much as £450 per person and yet we still manage to invest in services, including a capital investment programme for our community of £150-180m each year.

The Council's Treasury Management mid-year statement reports our income from investment activities at £7.2m per annum, a material sum. All the borrowing the Council has ever had to deliver all our capital road schemes, schools, affordable housing, regeneration, is at virtually no cost to our residents. Actually it is £7.52 per annum for a Band D tax payer. This borrowing has allowed us to accumulate realisable assets of almost £500m, not including value from optimising our significant land holdings.

We are one of the best council tax and business rate collectors in the country and were indeed the very highest achievers for council tax for four years running. Indeed our collection rates are holding up even in these difficult times.

Our Housing Companies are now running at a profit of over £650k per annum and net assets of £1.3m.

Our Wokingham town centre regeneration has secured committed rental in excess of 87% of its retail assets, some of which are not yet built, and has secured rental income in excess of the cost of borrowing with retailers still flocking in to take up units; even in current times. Again, we buck the trend.

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment, widely feared due to its intensive and thorough inspection, awarded the highest score for Wokingham under many of its financial themes each year and the highest score on all themes in one year. We were the only council to have achieved this accolade. More recently we have been reported in national journals and in external specialist reports as having excellent financial standing and financial management.

Our financial strength and standing are not something that has materialised overnight.

We cannot rest on our laurels as we will have severe financial challenges in the future. The work we have done and continue to do should be recognised for its incredible achievement and should not be blemished by untrue statements that bring the Council into disrepute and discredits all those that have given so much.

The comprehensive spending review has not been unhelpful to Wokingham but until the overall financial settlement is made, which is expected in December, we cannot fully assess the significance for Wokingham.

Please help me to help you. Those on this call are Councillors, the press and interested members of the public. What you do and say will have an enormous impact on public behaviour towards the virus and economic recovery. Please do not make things up with Trumpian statements from Twyford or bizarre references to buying a kitchen and cars from the faculty at Royal Holloway, or because it is politically expedient, or provides a good story. To get through this successfully residents must have confidence in the Council and the press. Residents must feel that we are doing our best to keep everyone safe, secure and happy.

Lastly stay safe and observe the rules. Thank you.

49. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

49.1 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Why does the Council consult the public on cuts to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme but not on Councillor pay rises?

Answer

I am somewhat surprised that you have asked this question Andy as you seem to have got the wrong end of the stick. It is my intention not to reduce those who qualify but to expand the scheme to disallow the Carers' Allowance as part of the money taken into consideration when making judgements on whether or not anybody will receive it. So there will be more carers that will actually qualify for this payment.

But let me answer your question. It is that the Council is obliged to comply with the legislation associated with these different subjects. Let me explain them in more detail.

There is a legal requirement to carry out a public consultation when considering changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. A consultation is required regardless of whether a negative or positive change, and as you heard earlier I am planning a positive change, but in Wokingham's case the key purpose of the consultation is to understand better how we can improve or how we extend the scheme. Indeed we think there is an opportunity, as I have said earlier, to disregard Carers' Allowances when taking into consideration. This will mean more carers will get the allowance.

The Local Authorities Members' Allowances, which is the second part of your question, is a regulation agreed in 2003 and it sets out the framework for Members' allowances to be awarded, in addition to detailing how the Independent Remuneration Panels, or IRP, could operate.

Wokingham Borough Council's IRP is made up of members of the public who voluntarily give up their time to conduct a biennial review of the Members' Allowances Scheme. Independent Remuneration Panel members are recruited via advertisements in the local

newspaper, on the WBC website, and via WBC social media streams. Potential candidates are then interviewed by the Lead Specialist for Democratic and Electoral Services and the Assistant Director for Governance. Successful candidates are then appointed for a three to four year term. The IRP make recommendations to the Council from an independent viewpoint and the decision as to whether to accept those recommendations is left to the elected Members.

There is no requirement within the legislation for a full consultation on recommendations from the IRP to be undertaken. The regulations underpinning Members' allowances and IRPs do however stipulate that upon receipt of a copy of a report made to it by the Independent Remuneration Panel, the local authority must as soon as reasonably practicable ensure that copies of that report are available for inspection by members of the public at the principal office of the authority and publish the recommendations and main features of the report in one or more newspapers circulating in the area. WBC adheres to these regulations, and welcomes any comments received upon publication of the report and the newspaper article. Any comments received would be passed on to the IRP ahead of the item going to the full Council meeting for debate and decision to be made by the Members.

Supplementary Question

You are right when you say that these processes are outlined by legislation but that is the minimum standard. There is nothing in legislation which prevents the Borough Council from putting out a consultation on Councillor pay rises which would inform the work of the IRP. I suspect that the reason we do not is that we will not necessarily get the answers which we want which brings me on to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The wording of the survey was very, very, poor and many people I have spoken to thought that the wording was designed in such a way as to encourage people to give answers that would result in less money going to the people who needed it the most.

Why can't we design a decent survey to get proper answers from people?

Supplementary Answer

I am looking for proper answers from people Andy and that is what I want to do. The other issue, of course, with regards to every time we go to consultation there is an element of cost involved with that. I mean we are following the legislation with all the other councils I know doing it that way. There is nobody else who doesn't do it that way and I cannot see any reason why we should change the way we do things just for it to cost the residents even more.

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

Question

We are aware that there have been a number of issues within Optalis over the past months. Have the relations between RBWM and WBC now improved?

Answer provided by the Leader of Council

Optalis remains key to this Council's delivery of Adult Social Care and improvement journey. Optalis continues to perform well in all key measures, with many positive comments from local residents who use the services and their families. Plans are being jointly developed to create additional front line capacity in the organisation. This will

facilitate continued measured growth, by providing a genuine alternative market option. This will also stimulate further efficiencies in the wider local adult care sector. In addition to this, further opportunities for driving efficiencies and improvements are being developed in partnership with the Director of Adult Services. I would also like to thank the staff at Optalis for all the hard work they have been putting in on the front line throughout the Covid period; many of them have gone above and beyond to make sure our residents are supported and safe.

As you are aware, in terms of the relationship between the two Council co-owners of Optalis, there has been an ongoing dispute in terms of agreeing an equitable split of central costs as laid out in the shareholder agreement. I am pleased to announce that RBWM have agreed to settle two parts of that dispute with positive ongoing negotiations to resolve the third and final element. So, the short answer to your question is yes there is an improvement I am positive about the future, but we do need to let these negotiations conclude over the coming weeks.

Supplementary Question

I have concerns about the current arrangements and feel that they may be unstable in the future. Do you also share that view?

Supplementary Answer provided by the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services

I think I have shared publicly before that the last 18 months we have been looking at Optalis and we have had a change of strategy. There has also been a review of governance; basically in everything the Company does. It obviously follows that just because a company was doing something when it was set up it does not mean that it is the right thing in perpetuity and that is what has driven this discussion.

I would say that relationships with Optalis have improved dramatically since the appointment of the new CEO, David Birch, and as John answered we are in a much better place than we were.

There are negotiations going on basically to resolve the third of the issues regarding future costs at the moment. I am hopeful of a positive outcome. Things have been much better with Optalis over the last six months and hopefully they will go that way. We within WBC are fully focussed on getting a relationship which works with Optalis but work most of all basically for our residents because that is who we are all here for to serve.

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

Question

Have you received any notification of changes to planning for the future proposals by the Ministry for Housing Community and Local Government as has been hinted at by the news media due to MPs revolting against the Government white paper?

Answer

We have not heard anything yet, official or unofficial. The only things that I have picked up is what you have probably alluded to that was in The Telegraph and reported through the BBC. But we have not had anything official yet. But let us hope that it is a U-turn.

Supplementary Question

There has been an appeal decision recently by the Inspectors saying that a two-storey extension was perfectly allowable based on the new rules. So does this mean that the new rules are actually in effect or not?

Supplementary Answer

I presume you were talking about permitted development rules. There is a document that was circulated by Marcia some time ago as a result of the question that Andy Croy asked me at the full Council meeting. I have asked Marcia to resend that note out to explain all the rules on permitted development and the latest rules on temporary permitted development through Covid. So you can look at that.

I do not know what actual one you are referring to but there are some circumstances where permitted development can be allowed but it does go through, what they call, prior approval through the Council. So it would have to go through a prior approval and it could get permission if it meets the criteria. Marcia is in the process of sending an updated note out to all Members.

49.4 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

Under our 'Love Wokingham' brand, Wokingham Town Council has setup a virtual access point for many of our local businesses in the town, which directs people to the online presence for our local shops and businesses. We have our own website and regularly promote these businesses on social media. During the lockdown windows we have been putting out lists of restaurants who are delivering takeaway food. A sort of virtual High Street, which we have not been charging for.

I can see that Wokingham Borough Council have decided to start up a Virtual Christmas Market for small local traders on a Facebook feed, for which they are, rather shockingly charging £20-£50 to use. Considering that there is clearly no web site development and this looks like a very minimal service, I am wondering what value it offers.

What is Wokingham Borough Council actually investing in to promote and support all virtual businesses across the Borough?

Answer

Firstly, I would just like to point out that Love Wokingham is funded by both the Borough and Town Council and its promotion of local businesses has been agreed between the two authorities. Therefore it is, itself one of the ways we are promoting and supporting businesses.

Just to give you a bit of background. You asked the question what other things we are doing and then I am going to come back to the fee:

- Approximately £19million of business rate relief have been provided;
- £20million of businesses grants have been provided, including discretionary;
- Website promotion of businesses providing virtual services;
- Provision of clear advice and guidance to help businesses operate in Covid-19 safe manner;
- Promotional signage to encourage safe local shopping;

- Social media promotion to encourage local shopping.

In terms of the virtual market fee, the Wokingham Virtual Christmas market was set up following the cancellation of an in-person ice rink and Christmas market style hut event due to Covid-19. To help support local businesses that would have been involved in the market we decided to take the market aspect virtually and online. Following some research it was decided to use a Facebook group style event in order to get the market up and running for the longest period.

In order to manage companies that were interested in becoming a stallholder we set up an application form in order to explain rules and responsibilities and also have a form of business identification; including insurance, hygiene certificates and website. This was to ensure consumer safety whilst we provided a platform for products to be sold on. A small admin fee applied to enter to the value of £20 for a small sole trader, self-employed or craft type business and a £50 fee for national or regional business with many shop premises. So far all of the 40-plus stallholders who have paid have entered at the £20 charge level.

The admin charge was introduced so that the page could be managed to allow only those stallholders entered to post, which prevents a build-up of hundreds of posts per day that you see in other market groups.

So in summary the stallholders receive:

- Support on any questions/queries they may have during the market time frame;
- Help to create an eye-catching post;
- Statistics on when to post, based on judging by the consumer habits for the previous week;
- Promotion of the market via WBC's social media channels, of which our Facebook alone has an average monthly post reach of one million;
- A virtual market open for 38 days, if joined from the start, which is one of the longest running in the country

This all takes away all the behind the scenes leg-work a small business would normally have to do allowing them to focus solely on their products and the selling. Consumers and stallholders are primarily from within the Borough, not just Wokingham town centre or the larger towns, but we also welcome consumers from surrounding areas to help the local business grow and access a new consumer group other than those local to them.

The secondary aim of the market alongside supporting local business and creating some Christmas cheer in some tough times is also to extend the reach of those businesses by giving them a platform to interact with people and make connections that will hopefully extend and help their business going into 2021.

It should be noted that reaction to the Christmas Market has been extremely positive and we have had no complaints from the businesses that have so far signed up.

Supplementary Question

While that sounds great, and all this sort of stuff, I would be interested to know how much revenue this is generating and what value for money these businesses are getting?

Particularly at this time I am also curious to know what is happening in other towns? I know what is happening in Wokingham.

Supplementary Answer

Obviously I have not got all that detail but I will try and get that dug out for you and get that back to you.

49.5 Tahir Maher asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Will the Council set up specific arrangements to assist with loneliness, which is currently impacting on many residents across the Borough? It not only impacts on the older population but during this pandemic it is impacting on younger people as well. Existing issues that were present before are now becoming increasingly chronic.

This Council needs to consider and work at three levels to address loneliness:

One to one:

- Launch a local campaign to raise awareness of the health effects of loneliness and isolation amongst target risk groups. Make sure this information is available both off and online;

Neighbourhood:

- Support the voluntary and community sector to further strengthen referral partnerships with frontline healthcare staff and social workers;

Strategic:

- Agree a long-term plan to act to prevent and reduce loneliness, so that it is part of the Council's strategic intent; to regularly measure loneliness and mapping need through needs assessment and/or lifestyle surveys. Results of this can be used to monitor the impact of interventions.

Answer

We already working in several key ways to address this.

First of all on a neighbourhood level we are very aware that Covid has significantly contributed to many residents feeling lonely and isolated. The Council many months ago set up the Wokingham Borough Community Response and one of the key aims was to provide welfare calls to vulnerable and lonely residents. The Council has funded additional money into The Link Visiting Scheme to increase their befriending scheme which involves one to one and group work and that is all about supporting a reduction in loneliness.

The Council has also for many months funded the One Front Door service, which is operated by the CAB, and widely publicised the number at many opportunities so that vulnerable residents, including those experiencing loneliness, can contact One Front Door to get the support needed. During the Covid-19 outbreak we have supported several thousand residents in need. As part of this local Covid groups have formed right across the Borough and these groups have provided a responsive neighbourhood support service to aim to get a real community approach to supporting people in need.

So to give you the latest figures on welfare calls in the last two weeks we have made 6,500. 1800 people already known to Adult Social Care have been contacted. 4,700 calls

and letters to other vulnerable people on the Government list. 150 referrals from that have gone to the CAB and 110 referrals to the Link Befriending Service.

That means that our proactive work has been all about picking up people who are suffering from loneliness and we are trying to do something about it.

On top of that we have the Wokingham Wellbeing Board Strategy which identified social isolation as one of its three key priorities. It set up a sub group involving the Council, the voluntary sector and Health and this reports on a regular basis to the Wellbeing Board. The Wokingham Integrated Partnership has an agreed work programme and this is specifically a project supporting isolation. This Partnership has involved the setting up of a Friendship Alliance, which is the Council, Involve, AgeUk, The LINK and the Wokingham Volunteer Centre. We have spent over £100k funding this project. This was initiated circa 12 months ago and is progressing well. Key parts of this project are:

- Expansion of the Volunteer Transport Scheme;
- Establishing a network of Friendship Champions across the Borough;
- Undertaking community engagement work; and
- The 'Link Express' which will involve a small group of well trained volunteers visiting older people within 2 to 3 weeks of referral to begin the process of improving mood and wellbeing through social connection.

So yes I agree with you that loneliness is a key priority for us. It is a key thing and we are very much aware that people are in need across our Borough and need help with this. We are doing a lot of things to try and do something about it.

Supplementary Question

It is nice to know that there is so much comprehensive work being done. Can you quantify your success in terms of where we were, where we are going to and so forth? Can you quantify that because it is quite, quite varied?

Supplementary Answer

This is obviously a difficult thing to measure because you are talking about people's emotional health. I think the best way I could quantify it right here, right now is obviously referring to the statistic I quoted earlier which is from the phone calls we have made that we have picked up 110 people who have said to us, when we have proactively called them, that they are lonely and they need help and they need someone to talk to basically. That is 110 referrals to The Link Befriending Service. Now The Link Befriending Services is something we are funding. It is something we are supporting. It is something we are promoting and it specifically exists to help people and I am sure that he will not mind me saying this but Councillor Halsall is one of those volunteers who is ringing people up, talking to people on a regular basis, to try and make sure that they are not alone.

We are very aware of our role to support the vulnerable and needy in our community during this difficult time and to make sure that no one is left behind.

So in answer to your question that is probably the easiest answer I can give you tonight. We are continuing down this road because we know it is the right thing to do and the feedback we are getting, which I would be happy to share with you, through the individual e-mails I have received tells us that it is the right thing to do.

Response from the Leader of Council

If I could add to that Tahir I was speaking today by invitation to a group of CCGs and health workers, some 200 leaders in the Health sector, and they were exemplifying our neighbourhood approach and what a model approach to reach out to our community, particularly in this area.

49.6 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

With reference to agenda item 50; Monitoring Customer Satisfaction, the report makes the following statement on 'From feedback to improvement': "Both quantitative and qualitative information is captured, which helps better understand the customer experience from first point of contact to resolution. Evaluating the customer journey in this way will help to understand strengths and weaknesses in ways of working, and actions that need to be taken to improve":

My question is what Members will be involved, and how then will that improvement manifest itself publicly?

Answer

As a Council we exist to serve our residents and our community. The 'Voice of the Customer' project is a key way that we are putting customer services and resident satisfaction at the heart of everything we do as a Council. While we already perform highly on our key measures of customer service, this project will allow us to better understand our resident's journey from identifying they have an issue or query, through to making contact with us and onwards to a hopefully successful resolution.

Gathering feedback from residents, either directly or via their elected representatives, will enable us to better understand their reasons for contacting us and help us to better redesign either our service provision or our channels of communication to better meet the customer service needs.

We would welcome comments and input from Members around this voice of the customer project. Councillor Frewin has already been in contact with Council Officers and has volunteered his help and career expertise in this area, which has been greatly appreciated so far. If other Members wish to offer their insight or expertise, I will gratefully receive it.

How will it manifest itself publicly is a great question? I don't want to pre-empt the results of the work before it is undertaken but I would hope that we:

- will make it easier for residents to directly interact with us;
- will design services in line with the way residents want to use them not how we want them to use them;
- find more ways to support those less able and those reliant on the support of others to access our services; and
- resolve and respond to issues more quickly and use those resolutions to better inform our decision making and our future communications.

Supplementary Question

I welcome that and I think it is a very positive action to take but what I don't want to see is the decisions being taken as to how we are improving our service done, how can I say

through PR, without the involvement of Members. I would think every Member would commit themselves to being able to offer help or comment on this. So what I would suggest is when you get to a situation where you have found the various weaknesses that you do speak to Members and ask them for their observations. I think it is a very positive move and I do welcome it so thank you for that.

Supplementary Answer

Just on that point I have already committed to the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee that once the new Customer Service Strategy is ready to be delivered that I will take it that Committee so that it can go through the formal scrutiny process.

Customer service is an ongoing thing we are not going to stop it. It needs to be at the heart of everything that we do so it is an ongoing prerogative of every Member if they have got an idea of how we can improve our customer service I want to hear it.

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

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

Question

Thank you for Agenda item 49: Support and Care Procurement. This will bring in a framework agreement and resolve the fact, over time, that there are many individual contracts and spot purchases in WBC Adult Services. I hope this will enable a consistent and good quality service for all users, while, in the long term, also reducing cost. As Liberal Democrats, we would encourage this type of development to stabilise services and costs. How is the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services, going to ensure that, while developing this framework, people in care settings do not have disruptive or unnecessary changes to their care?

Answer

Our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best Boroughs in the country for adults and carers in need of support and care to live, where they feel safe, included and to be a key part of our community. Our procurement, basically which this is part of, will help us achieve this ambition and with our partners will enable us to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal support and care and where possible to improve people's health and wellbeing, focusing on prevention and self-help.

Supported Living is a service designed to help people with a wide range of support needs to retain their independence by being supported in their own home. Home care is looking after a person from the comfort of their own home.

At any one time there are approximately 700 people who are in receipt of a supported living or a home care service. Approximately 30 adult care packages are let every month totalling 360 per year. Providers on the framework will support vulnerable adults, adults with disabilities and older people to achieve the desired outcomes that are important and personal to them. They will help deliver Wokingham's ambitions for adult social care in the Borough, to ensure that all residents are enabled to achieve their personal goals and ambitions, in a context which promotes safety, independence and choice.

It is the intention that through this procurement exercise we will continue to meet all of our obligations under the Care Act, ensuring a sustainable and vibrant market that provides high quality services to residents and offers value for money for the Council. At the centre of this is our aim to ensure that services are personalised and are in the best interest of our clients. We recognise the importance of ensuring continuity for all residents and minimising disruption.

The Care and Support Framework is being developed in collaboration with our local market and social care providers and they will have the opportunity to work with us when making this framework. We will continue to work with all our care providers and make this as open and transparent as possible. It is anticipated that virtually all of the providers we currently work with will join the framework. These providers will transfer with their current packages of care, with the client experiencing no disruption in service.

There will be a six month mobilisation for the new framework. We will work closely with providers that may choose not to engage with the procurement exercise or may be unsuccessful in their tender submissions. These packages will be reviewed, and a decision may be made to change provision to a framework provider where it is in the best interests of the client. This would be managed and clients would be fully supported via a social worker. Alternatively clients can be offered direct payments allowing them to receive their existing service with their existing provider if they choose to do so.

We recognise that at times people's needs may be better met by providers who are not on the framework and our process will allow us to use these providers as we need, ensuring that the clients' interest is the main focus and priority.

Supplementary Question

My supplementary is two-fold in some ways because you said that you would hopefully be able to reduce some people's care because this was all streamlined and so on and I wondered how that will happen? I would have hoped that they were getting the care they need at the moment.

Also the fact that you say that you might well be able to use services outside the framework. I am not sure how that works because you are setting up a framework and then you say we could also use providers outside the framework if you need to.

Supplementary Answer

All existing contracts for care will remain in place until the framework starts. So there will be no change to any resident who is using a contract at the moment.

To deal with your second point first we want the best for our residents and we will always, if somebody wants to use another provider and wants to bring that into the discussion, we will always look at those people. The framework is not a rigid set of rules and it will change over time to reflect basically what is happening in the market place, what people want, and what the situation is that people want.

Our aim is very much to use this to drive quality, to increase choice and to create more stability as well as for the sake of the Council to create more financial control over what we are doing going forwards.

We are the biggest budget in the Council and everybody knows the situation with national funding of adult social care, which is a continuing pressure, and it is very important that

every pound we spend is spent wisely but the full focus is going to be on achieving the right levels of care for residents. What will happen basically when the framework starts is that people will have the option of staying on the existing contract or moving into the framework and they can choose to stay on the existing contract if they wish to. That is very much the aim of what we are doing here. Better quality, more security basically and a better deal for residents and a better relationship with our suppliers going forward.

49.8 Chris Bowring asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Relating to Agenda Item 49 "Support and Care Procurement" – How does the proposed framework for Support and Care procurement tie into your wider plan for Adult Social Care in Wokingham Borough?

Answer

I won't repeat things that I have just said to David but to answer your question directly our ambition is for Wokingham Borough to be one of the best Boroughs in the country and the Care and Support Framework will help us achieve this ambition and work with our partners to enable us to prevent, reduce and delay the need for formal support and care and where possible to improve people's health and wellbeing, focusing mainly on prevention and self-help. The final specifications will require providers to deliver reablement and strength based commissioning where the individual will always be at the centre of any support.

Adult Social Care will work closely with all the adult social care providers to ensure a high quality choice of services are provided to support and safeguard vulnerable residents, enabling them to achieve our key priority which is to remain independent as long as possible in their own homes and communities. Through this Framework we will ensure that improvements are made in the training and development of the carer workforce.

The Framework will strengthen our commissioning practice, improving the strategic oversight of commissioned activity, market intelligence and engagement with our providers. This will create a much greater stability of placements for our most vulnerable and increase quality assurance resulting in improved outcomes.

So basically in terms of your question how will it support our wider plan? Our wider plan is to drive quality to make sure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent wisely and also to deliver on budget. This Department is the biggest in the Council in terms of expenditure. It has been on budget for three years now in an environment where we are underfunded by central Government and there is increasing pressure on us. For me that is no mean achievement but we are not going to rest on our laurels. We are going to keep going and this is a key part in doing it.

Supplementary Question

You said to David that Adult Social Care is clearly the largest budget in the Council and you indicated how the framework will deliver longer term contracts with more control. Are there any other steps that you have taken that would ensure that we provide high quality services and keep expenditure under control?

Supplementary Answer

Two main things that I would talk about in answer to your question. Since I have been in post, and the current DASS, a key priority for us has been to improve our financial

forecasting and keep better budget controls of where we are. We spent the first probably three to four months that I was in this position just working on strengthening our forecasting so that we always knew our expenditure and our current financial position by streamlining the IT, employing a better accountant and working hard in that area.

I mean the other thing I would say, which is something that is going to launch fairly shortly, is we have spent the last 12 months working on a programme to improve the way we manage demand. This service, probably 90% of the expenditure, is on commissioned services rather than staff and the whole point of this demand management approach is that you cannot get better in this service by reducing staff or increasing staff it is about how you spend the money, how you recognise the need and identify what people need earlier. Trying to enable them to live at home if they need support from the voluntary sector and trying to direct them to that. We are going to be adopting an approach which has been successful in several other councils and the aim is simply we will improve quality to people that way and if Adult Social Care does nothing different every year our costs, due to the ageing population and their increasing need, will rise by 4% a year. The aim of this programme as well is that it will slow our increase in costs by roughly 50% so we will be doing more with taxpayers' money and improving quality.

50. FEES AND CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed fees and charges for Council services, including those for the Wokingham element of the Public Protection Partnership.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report, the purpose of which was to ensure that appropriate fees and charges were levied for each service, and highlighted that most of the charges would be enacted from 1 December 2020. However sports, cemeteries, housing, training course and youth and community charges would take effect from 1 January 2021 (sports) and 1 April 2021 respectively.

In response to a question about the new artificial cricket pitch and nets at Cantley Park the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure confirmed that private cricket clubs, schools and the public would be able to use these facilities and several enquiries had already been received.

Following a query by Councillor Kaiser, about why some of the sports and leisure charges had increased by a higher percentage than other charges, Councillor Batth explained that these charges had not been increased for some time and due to the current financial pressures caused by Covid it was felt that they should be brought into line with many other local authorities. Councillor Batth confirmed that benchmarking had taken place to ensure that these charges remained competitive and despite the increase they were still the cheapest when compared with the benchmarked authorities.

In order to support the community and businesses after the devastating impact on the livelihoods of those and the people who worked for them Councillor Kaiser proposed that an additional recommendation be added which would agree an ongoing policy of free Saturday car parking in the Council's car parks during the run up to Christmas in December. This year being Saturday 5th, 12th and 19th December which would be supported by a supplementary estimate of up to £20k. This would help both residents and business owners alike at this very difficult time. This additional recommendation was supported.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved to be effective from the dates listed on the schedule;
- 2) Wokingham's discretionary fees and charges for the Public Protection Partnership be approved and the statutory charges be noted, as set out in Appendix B, effective from 1 April 2021;
- 3) an ongoing policy of free Saturday car parking in Council car parks during the run up to Christmas in December, this year being Saturday the 5th, 12th and 19th December supported by a supplementary estimate of up to £20k be approved.

51. SUPPORT AND CARE PROCUREMENT

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Support and Care Procurement Framework. This procurement exercise would enable Adult Social Care to commission high quality, cost effective care for vulnerable adults in need of supported living or home care.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised that the Framework would formalise the process for letting contracts which would lead to competition being generated, better quality of services, forecasting and relationships with suppliers and the provision of longer contracts.

The intention was that the Framework, which sets up a spend of £74m over five years, most of which will be on statutory care commissioned services, would be in place in the Summer 2021. It was confirmed that the Framework would be set up to ensure that if a supplier was not performing there would be an opportunity to stop using that particular supplier.

RESOLVED that full Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) Officers to proceed with the Support and Care procurement, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) Officers to create a compliant framework, from which to call off support and care packages;
- 3) The Director of Adult Social Services to have 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.

52. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE 20/21 – MONITORING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to fund the implementation of a user-friendly multi-channel tool to measure customer satisfaction and gather feedback from customers in real time which could then be used to inform service improvement and increase satisfaction.

The Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions went through the report and advised that the request was to fund access to the GovMetrics insight tool which was already used by 70 local authorities around the country to gather

resident feedback, compare key measures and to educate service redesign. Investing in this software would help the Council improve its customer service to residents and better target where service improvements were required and why, which would then deliver future cost savings. In addition the information provided would enable target switching of services to self-service and the promotion of existing self-service options; thereby lowering costs and enabling staff to focus their time and efforts on residents who needed more detailed help and support. It would also help the Council to respond to repeat issues faster and better understand the frustrations and challenges that residents have when trying to access Council services.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a Supplementary Estimate for £20,000 be approved;
- 2) the ongoing annual costs of £12,500 per annum for a further 2 years be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 2 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.50 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, UllaKarin Clark, Pauline Jorgensen and Wayne Smith

Other Councillors Present

Andy Croy
Richard Dolinski
Pauline Helliard-Symons
Graham Howe
Abdul Loyes
Barrie Patman
Alison Swaddle

53. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro and Gregor Murray.

Councillor Richard Dolinski, Deputy Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services attended the meeting on behalf of Councillor Margetts. In accordance with legislation Councillor Dolinski could take part in any discussions but was not entitled to vote.

54. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

55. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

This is possibly the last time we will meet as an Executive this year. I want to briefly take the opportunity to set out a clear commitment to everybody that we, Wokingham Borough Council, will not allow any of our residents go hungry or cold during this Covid-blighted winter.

The two initiatives that will be discussed tonight are important in this: they will make sure we target support to children, families, individuals and businesses most in need. We are, however, prepared to go further, indeed, as far as is necessary, to make good on that commitment. Therefore, I can also state tonight that, should it be necessary, we will find more funding, via a properly accounted supplementary estimate, to support those most in need.

We are not starting this from scratch, but the impact of Covid-19 has made this an even more important issue for us. In the interests of brevity, I will not repeat all the ways in which we are tackling poverty and the impact of poverty in the Borough. Some examples will suffice:

- Our various green energy and insulation schemes have brought direct savings of up to 25% on fuel bills and helped alleviate fuel poverty for more the 500 households;
- Our local welfare provision scheme provides emergency help to people in financial crisis;

- Our Council Tax Reduction Scheme helps people on low incomes. I am delighted to say, following a recent consultation, we are working on plans to extend this following due decision-making progress.

Together with the initiatives to be discussed tonight, we will be launching a Kick-Start programme, which will help young people move from Universal Credit to secure jobs, and a digital inclusion project to collect unused IT equipment and recycle it for those people currently unable to access digital technology.

I would briefly update on our ongoing progress on another important issue for us which is equalities.

In recent months we have signed the Race at Work Charter as a commitment to advance equality and tackle racism in the workplace. We have also identified an external facilitator to work with us and the Borough's BME Forum, in order to help us and the Forum resolve issues to find a consensus for the Borough's future. We are using the findings from the Tackling Racism Matter survey to draft clear objectives that will go back to the public and stakeholders for discussion before they are agreed.

We will be bringing in the New Year to the Executive and Council the next steps in bringing forward a Poverty Strategy and a revised Equalities Policy.

In all of these vital efforts, we are working with the voluntary sector organisations in a genuine and strengthening partnership that brings mutual benefit to all. We gain from the expertise and community connections the voluntary sector brings and they gain from the financial and other support a local authority can provide. We are also working in close partnership with the health institutions, the CCG, the NHS and GPs and with the blue light institutions, the police, the fire service and the ambulance service. It is a win-win arrangement that is bringing tangible benefits to residents, which we will continue to develop.

Just a last point on a topical note, there are no Arcadia or Debenhams shops in Wokingham Borough; I am sure you will be pleased to hear.

56. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

56.1 Daniel Hinton had asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:

Question

With the end of lockdown will these grants being offered help to get businesses going again?

Answer

There are a number of grants and schemes available nationally and regionally to support business and at Wokingham we are currently administering two grant schemes aimed at supporting businesses hit by the recent four week lockdown restrictions.

The first is a mandatory grant aimed at companies who have been forced to close and who are registered for business rates. In the past two weeks we have paid out more than £529,000 of grants to local businesses.

The scheme I am seeking Executive approval for tonight is to offer grants to those businesses who have been impacted by the last four week's restrictions but who risked falling through the net because they didn't fit the criteria for other schemes. In particular we hope to be able to help support any of our market traders who have been unable to trade as well as those small businesses whose income relies on trade with businesses who themselves have had to close.

By offering grants of £1,500 per business we hope to go some way towards covering any loss of income ahead of, what we all hope, is a busy trading period for them from now through to Christmas.

However this is just one part of a longer term support package we hope to be able to put in place using the £3.4m we have allocated through the Additional Restrictions Grant fund. The money needs to cover all our business support activity through to the end of March 2022 and over the next few months I look forward to bringing a range of new grant and support packages back for approval.

I can assure you that any future scheme or initiative will be developed in partnership with our business community to make sure the money has the biggest possible impact on our hardworking local companies and individuals.

56.2 Philip Cunnington asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

There have been concerns about mental health during the Covid emergency, will these Government Winter Payments help residents in this respect?

Answer

The Department for Work and Pensions has specified that the Covid Winter Grant Scheme funds should be used to provide ring-fenced support with the costs of food, energy and related items. It is not a grant intended to directly address mental and emotional health concerns resulting from the Covid emergency, although the support is designed to relieve financial pressures and associated stress and hardship experienced by families and individuals.

I am delighted to announce that we have concluded an arrangement with Oxfordshire Mind who will provide for our residents a new service in the near future for mental health.

56.3 Annette Medhurst asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Wokingham Foodbank provides support for households across the Borough that are unable to afford to buy food and other essentials, and where appropriate heating and lighting. So far this year the Foodbank has received just over 250 referrals from departments at Wokingham Borough Council including Children's Services, community engagement and local welfare provision. The Covid Winter Grant Scheme Report states that approximately £100,000 will be distributed to families and individuals in need to provide support with food, water and utilities. How will WBC ensure that this scheme is

fully understood and accessible to its front line staff working with vulnerable households across the Borough such that they refer into this scheme rather than the Foodbank?

Answer

We want to be sure Annette, and I thank you for your question, that we reach the families and individuals most in need during this difficult time.

The Borough will ensure that a comprehensive communication campaign is rolled out across the Borough and internally within the Council to ensure that families, individuals and their representatives understand the purpose of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme, who might benefit from support from the scheme, and how to apply for support through the scheme.

It is proposed that any individual or family will be eligible to apply for support, or a representative, who may be a front-line worker at the Council, a charitable or voluntary organisation, a partner organisation, or a member of the public can apply on their behalf.

We are very keen to work with our partners from the charity and voluntary sector to identify families who are in need and signpost them to the scheme for support or assist them in their applications.

Supplementary Question

From the point where a struggling family for example talk to their social worker how long will it take for the household to actually receive support from this scheme?

Supplementary Answer

I think that is a very difficult question because it depends on the complexity of their need. We, as you know, have adopted a One Front Door Scheme so the need would be referenced through there and then fed out to the various departments. We are very, very, keen to ensure that we meet every need in terms of both home, heat and food.

56.4 Claire Revie sked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

At Share Wokingham we distribute food to households that have been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. While most people come to us at Norreys Church we occasionally need to deliver food to support self-isolating households. How will the Local Authority help families eligible for support from the Covid Winter Grant Scheme but unable to physically get out to the shops to buy food with the vouchers that have been issued?

Answer

For those families who are unable to physically get out to the shops to use food and grocery vouchers provided, there will be an option for families to email or provide the vouchers to a representative who can use the vouchers on their behalf and deliver food and groceries safely to their door.

56.5 Emma Cantrell had asked the Leader of the Council the following question but as she was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:

Question

First Days is a local charity that works to reduce the impact of poverty on families in the Wokingham area and beyond. Many of the families we support are very anxious and struggling with additional costs at this time of year, particularly fuel to heat their homes. There are a high number of domestic energy suppliers in the UK and how support is offered to families might vary according to the company that supplies their gas or electricity as well as whether they have a pre-payment meter or pay by direct debit. How will this scheme be rolled out and how will we, as a local anti-poverty charity, refer our families into it for support?

Answer

It is proposed that there is provision through this scheme for any individual or family to apply for support, or for a representative, who may be a front-line worker at the Council, a charitable or voluntary organisation, a partner organisation, or a member of the public, to apply on their behalf. This will be via a referral into the Citizens' Advice Wokingham Covid One Front Door who will act as triage for the application, providing a recommendation to the Council for support. The Council will then arrange distribution of funds.

Funds can be distributed in a variety of ways to best meet the needs of the beneficiary. This will include vouchers, payment cards credited with a specific amount, payments into bank accounts, or in exceptional circumstances, cash. Each applicant will be assessed according to their need and funds provided in a way designed to address their specific circumstances.

57. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

57.1 Alison Swaddle asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Councillor Halsall, can we have confidence that the Winter Grant payments will be distributed before Christmas?

Answer

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme provides £208,703 to Wokingham Borough Council to support families and individuals who are struggling to meet the cost of food and energy bills between 1st December 2020 and 31st March 2021.

It is proposed that the grant will be distributed in three ways:

1. food vouchers to be provided to the families of the 2,166 children and young people in Wokingham in receipt of a means-tested Free School Meals to cover the Christmas holidays 2020 and February half term 2021 (£15 per child per holiday week). The total cost of this will be approximately £100,000.

We are working closely with schools to ensure that the vouchers covering the Christmas holidays are distributed before the end of this term. We have a plan in place to achieve this and we have systems and support in place which will be ready for schools to use shortly after the Executive Meeting tonight. Schools have been fully briefed about our plan.

The remainder of the vouchers will be distributed shortly before the beginning of the February half term holiday.

2. Support to be provided to up to 100 Care Leavers with the costs of food and/or energy and the total cost of that will be around £5,000.

We are working closely with our leaving care team to ensure that support is provided at a time over the winter months which best meets the needs of Care Leavers. We are ready to provide support as advised by our specialist teams.

3. Support to be provided to families and individuals in need who do not fall into the above two categories. Front-line services who are already in contact with the families and individuals in need will be able to refer them for support via the existing Covid Community Response One Front Door operated by Wokingham Citizens' Advice Bureau. The Citizens' Advice Bureau will assess families and individuals for this and other support and forward details of families in need to the Council who will provide support from the grant funds. We will monitor carefully the demand from families and individuals for support, and should need exceed the funds available, a further paper detailing need and proposed response will be considered by the Executive.

Supplementary Question

It is about Edenred, who I understand are the proposed supplier for the distribution of the free school meal vouchers. They were commissioned by the Government to deliver the scheme earlier on in the pandemic and at that time, as I think we are all fully aware, there were very well-publicised problems and delays. Are you confident that this isn't going to be repeated?

Supplementary Answer

We are assured that all the issues experienced early in the roll out of the scheme have now been addressed. We are now also setting up a helpline for school staff, who will be processing the distribution of vouchers via the Edenred portal, so that emerging problems can be dealt with quickly. No schools have expressed concerns about using Edenred this time round.

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

Question

Will the Covid Winter Grant Scheme ensure that no child in the Borough will go hungry this winter?

Answer

We are committed to ensuring that no child goes hungry over the winter months. The Covid Winter Grant Scheme as I said provides £208,703 to Wokingham Borough Council to support families and individuals who are struggling to meet the cost of food and energy bills between 1st December 2020 and 31st March 2021.

It is proposed that the grant is distributed in three ways:

1. Food vouchers to be provided to the families of the 2,166 children and young people in Wokingham in receipt of means-tested Free School Meals to cover the

Christmas holidays 2020 and February half term 2021 (that is £15 per child per holiday week). The total cost of this will be approximately £100,000.

2. Support to be provided to up to 100 Care Leavers with the costs of food and/or energy bills. Total cost of about £5,000.
3. Support to be provided to families and individuals in need who do not fall into the above two categories. Front-line services who are already in contact with families and individuals in need will be able to refer them for support via the existing Covid Community Response One Front Door operated by Wokingham Citizens' Advice Bureau. The Citizens' Advice Bureau will assess the families and individuals for this and other support and forward details of families in need to the Council who will provide support from the grant funds. We will monitor carefully the demand from families and individuals for support, and should need exceed the funds available a further paper detailing need and proposed response will be considered by an emergency Executive.

Supplementary Question

A family or individual may experience several periods of need throughout the winter months. How can we ensure that families and individuals receive help when they need it?

Supplementary Answer

A family or individual will be able to apply for support, or have an application submitted on their behalf, as many times as is necessary over the period of the grant.

57.3 Barrie Patman asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

What are the arrangements for Phase 2 of the Additional Restrictions Grant – Discretionary Grants Scheme?

Answer

Our current focus is obviously on supporting businesses who have been impacted by the last four weeks of the lockdown restrictions. We have already paid out over half a million pounds of mandatory business grants and are already encouraging businesses to submit applications for Phase 1 of our Discretionary Grants Scheme that I hope the Executive will approve tonight.

In the meantime we will continue to work with the local businesses to offer support and advice where appropriate including signposting to other potential sources of financial support available through central Government and other agencies.

Wokingham Borough has been awarded £3.4m of Additional Restrictions Grant to support companies over the next 16 months and we want to make sure we listen to businesses so that we target the money where and when it is needed most. We have growing relationships with the business community on an individual basis as well as through business organisations and our own Covid Business Taskforce; all of whom are feeding into the economic response and recovery plans.

With Wokingham moving into Tier 2, after the lockdown, we are already looking at extending the current Discretionary Scheme to cover businesses who will continue to be impacted as a result of the additional restrictions that the higher tier means.

With Councillor Munro I have already asked Officers to develop options for additional grant or other support schemes to be launched in the new year aiming to support businesses through what is always a challenging time even without the additional impact of Covid.

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

Question

Whilst the grants in the report are designated for businesses, many are run by families who have a great dependency on these distributions to survive. Can you assure us that those that are vulnerable, as a consequence of shortfalls in business or indeed any other families, will not suffer homelessness within the Borough of Wokingham?

Answer

I think everybody knows that I take homelessness very seriously and I can confirm that at Wokingham Borough we have a strong record of working with households and landlords to sustain tenancies and avoid homelessness. All households who approach the Council will receive individual advice and assistance and where required a homeless application will be taken and we will support them in line with our statutory duties.

Unfortunately, there will almost certainly be cases of homelessness as a result of the economic impact of Covid but I can assure you the team will continue to do everything in their power to try and prevent these incidences and where they are unable to do so we will support the affected households.

I can also advise that Wokingham Borough Council has been successful in bidding for £1.1m of homelessness funding in the financial year, along with a Homelessness Grant of £448k. These funds will help some of the most vulnerable in the Borough. £160k over 3 years for Housing First delivery. There is immediate support of £204k, Next Steps Capital funding which is £675k, and rough sleepers the initial payment which is £91k on top of the Homelessness Grant which is £448k.

Wokingham Borough Council has been successful implementing the “all in policy” for rough sleepers since March, when we were requested by Government to accommodate all rough sleepers and we will continue to do so through the winter months and beyond.

Since the start of March Wokingham Borough Council has placed 64 households into temporary accommodation in response to the pandemic, 21 (34%) have been moved into settled accommodation.

We have been successful in our bid to fund the roll out of Housing First in the Borough. With a capital contribution of £675k from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government we will be purchasing five homes via our local housing company for the vulnerable rough sleepers. We also have received £150k in revenue funding from the Government to provide intensive in-reach support for our Housing First cohort over the next 3 years.

57.5 Pauline Helliar-Symons asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Can you ensure that all families in need will be catered for by the support provided by the Covid Winter Grant Scheme?

Answer

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme provides £208,703 to Wokingham Borough Council to support families and individuals who are struggling to meet the cost of food and energy bills between 1st December 2020 and 31st March 2021.

It is proposed that the grant is used in three ways as I have already commented:

1. Food vouchers to be provided to the families of the 2,166 children and young people in Wokingham in receipt of means-tested Free School Meals to cover the Christmas holidays 2020 and February half term 2021 (£15 per child per holiday week). The total cost of this will be approximately £100,000.
2. Support to be provided to up to 100 Care Leavers with the costs of food and energy bills. Total cost £5,000.
3. Support to be provided to families and individuals in need who do not fall into the above two categories. Front-line services who are already in contact with families and individuals in need will be able to refer them for support via the existing Covid Community Response One Front Door operated by Wokingham Citizens' Advice Bureau. The Citizens' Advice Bureau will assess families and individuals for this and other support and forward details of families in need to the Council who will provide support from the grant funds. We will monitor carefully the demand from families and individuals for support, and should need exceed the funds available, a further paper detailing need and proposed response will be considered by the Executive.

All of that I have already said. In answer to your specific question we do have our ways of determining the families who are in need with the information we have currently got. However, if we should have missed any then Councillors or well-meaning people should refer them to the Citizens' Advice Bureau and at the end of the day should that fail refer them to me or another Councillor or Executive Member who will then ensure that nobody falls through the cracks. I think that is very important for us to summon everybody, which we can, to make sure that nobody falls through the cracks.

Supplementary Question

It is known that fraudsters have been targeting Covid-19 support funds. How will the risk of fraud be mitigated so that the funds are received by those that genuinely need them?

Supplementary Answer

Checks are being put in place to verify the identity of those eligible for the scheme. Cash will only be used in exceptional circumstances to avoid use of the funds for items or services outside the scope and intent of the grant. If fraud is suspected, the Department for Work and Pensions will be notified so that any emerging threats can be identified and shared with other authorities.

We are very conscious of the possibilities and we are doing everything we can to ensure that we are validating applications whilst not using that as an excuse for letting people down.

57.6 Andy Croy asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Executive plans to give grocery and clothing vouchers to families in receipt of free school meals over the school holidays. The option to give families cash has been barely considered, but it was an option that was allowed by Government.

A moral judgement has been made on the ability of the parents to manage their cash.

How many of the parents were expected to spend cash on tobacco and alcohol?

Answer

I really do not think that is a question for us. For clarity, the vouchers to be distributed to the parents/carers of children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals can be spent on food and groceries, not clothing.

The choice of food and grocery vouchers over cash is based on the following considerations:

- A successful scheme for distribution of vouchers through schools is already in place and has been used already during the Covid pandemic, which means that we can put these arrangements in place quickly to ensure that families benefit from support without delay.
- We want to support families who may be struggling with debt to be able to ring-fence these funds for essential food and grocery items so that no child goes hungry over the Christmas and February half term breaks.
- Families have a wide choice of supermarkets and food outlets in which they can use the vouchers. 10 supermarkets and other outlets are involved in the scheme, 9 of which have a physical presence in Wokingham.
- The means of distribution of vouchers is designed to be non-stigmatising. Parents and carers exchange voucher eCodes for store eGift vouchers of their choice.

We trust that families will want support from us which can be used to benefit their children over the Christmas and half term breaks. Use of vouchers provides ring-fenced choice and protects families from feeling pressured into using cash towards settlement of debt or other liabilities.

I would add that we are operating a scheme which is consistent with our neighbours: West Berkshire, Bracknell, and the Royal Borough. But I guess importantly for you it is the scheme which is being used by Reading Borough Council.

Supplementary Question

I think it is a question for the Executive because it is the Executive which has decided to give vouchers not cash. The local geography is interesting but I am not concerned about

what goes on in other Boroughs John and I do not think you should be either. You should be concerned about what is going on in Wokingham.

You have mentioned several times the ring fencing of cash and debt but you are unable to tell me what proportion of parents cannot be trusted. Do you not think that this is simply a lack of trust and that there is a moral judgement that people are impoverished because in some way they lack moral virtue and that this decision is as a result of that?

Supplementary Answer

It is not for me as Leader of the Council to judge people's morals. I am neither a priest nor a philosopher and I would not do so. We are faced with a task in trying to ameliorate hunger, poverty and destitution during a period which is a period of a pandemic. So, our administrative arrangements are purely administrative in order to reach as many people as we possibly can but I would point out to you that one of the concerns in using money is if somebody has an overdraft and we put money into their bank it is not entirely clear that they will be able to use the money we put in their bank. So, I am not sure that your judgement is correct when other Boroughs similar to ours have made a judgement very similar to ours independently. But anyway, thank you for raising it.

58. COVID WINTER GRANT SCHEME REPORT

The Executive considered a report relating to proposals for the distribution of the Covid Winter Grant Scheme.

The Executive Member for Children's Services introduced the report and advised that the Department for Work and Pensions had provided a grant across all local authorities of £70m from which Wokingham Borough Council had been allocated £280,703. The first tranche (50%) had already been received to cover the period 1st December 2020 to 31st March 2021. The purpose of the grant was to help struggling families and individuals with the cost of food, utility bills and other associated items. At least 80% of the grant was ringfenced to benefit families with children and up to 20% for the benefit of individuals.

Councillor Dolinski queried whether, if there was any problem with the administration of the system, the vouchers would be backdated. In response Councillor Clark confirmed that all children in receipt of benefits-related Free School Meals would automatically receive vouchers distributed by Edinred and these would be sent to the relevant school. If need appeared later, once the schools were closed, the individual could go to the Citizens' Advice Bureau or any charity for support. The Leader of Council confirmed that if there was a problem with the administration of the grant then the Council would ensure that any problems were solved.

In response to a query about how the Council was going to ensure that anyone receiving the vouchers would not feel stigmatised Councillor Clark confirmed that the vouchers would contain an Ecode with which families could purchase gift cards which would be the same as those purchased by anyone.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the distribution of food vouchers to a total value of £100,000 to cover the Christmas 2020 and February 2021 half-term breaks to families with children in receipt of means-tested free school meals be approved;

- 2) the distribution of up to £5,000 in total to Care Leavers to ensure that they have sufficient access to food and utilities over the winter months be approved;
- 3) the distribution of the remainder of the grant through referral of families and individuals in need by voluntary sector partners (including under the umbrella of INVOLVE), other partners, and internal front-line staff into the Community Response Front Door facilitated by the Citizen's Advice Bureau be approved;
- 4) that authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services, to make decisions about the process for determination of level of support provided and means of delivery of support under 2 and 3 above, in line with guidance provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

59. ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT (ARG) – DISCRETIONARY GRANTS SCHEME PHASE 1

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed policy for Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) – Discretionary Grants Scheme Phase 1.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing highlighted that Additional Restrictions Grant funding in the sum of £3.4m had been awarded to the Council, which would be administered via a phased approach until March 2022 with £400k being made available immediately to fund Phase 1 of the Discretionary Grant Scheme. This would cover businesses which had been impacted by the national lockdown restrictions which had been in force from 5 November-2 December 2020.

Councillor Kaiser advised that the remaining £3m would be used to support businesses through to March 2022, predominantly in the form of future discretionary grant schemes or phases. This discretionary scheme would supplement the mandatory scheme of £1.4m of which over £500k had already been paid out to those businesses which had been mandated to close under the national lockdown restrictions.

In response to a query from Councillor Batth, about where there was any contingency built in if more funds were required, Councillor Kaiser confirmed that unfortunately the Government had made it clear that the £3.4m was expected to last until March 2022 even if more lockdowns were imposed.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Wokingham Borough Council's Additional Restrictions Grant - Discretionary Grants Scheme Phase 1 policy, relating to the Covid 19 pandemic as set out in Appendix 1 of the report be approved.
- 2) authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member of Finance and Housing, to make minor amendments to the Policy as required for future phases.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.59 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: John Kaiser and Stuart Munro

Officers Present

Catherine Brimble, Landscape Architect
Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery
Lyndsay Jennings, Legal Specialist
Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager
Clare Lawrence, Assistant Director – Place Services
Chris Traill, Director - Place & Growth
Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Nick Chancellor
Mark Croucher
Andrew Fletcher
Senjuti Manna
Sophie Morris

33. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Carl Doran.

34. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

35. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Pauline Jorgensen declared an interest in item number 38, on the grounds that she had previously been the Executive Member for Housing. Pauline added that she had not formed a view regarding this item, and would keep an open mind during discussions. Pauline stated that she would take part in the vote.

Angus Ross declared an interest in item number 37, on the grounds that he was involved in the concept during his time as an Executive Member. In addition, Angus stated that he was a member of the Ramblers association. Angus added that he had not made any determination regarding this item, and would go into discussions with an open mind. Angus stated that he would take part in the vote.

Angus Ross declared an interest in item number 39, on the grounds that he had originally had some involvement with this site. Angus stated that he would go into discussions with

an open mind, and had taken no involvement in this planning application. Angus stated that he would take part in the vote.

Gary Cowan declared a prejudicial interest in item number 39, on the grounds that he had made comments in the past relating to this application. Gary added that he would take no part in this item.

Simon Weeks declared a prejudicial interest in item number 39, on the grounds that he had made comments in the past relating to this application. Simon added that he would take no part in this item, and the Vice Chairman would Chair this particular item.

Simon Weeks declared an interest in item number 38, on the grounds that he was the Ward Member for the area and had been involved with the residents on the estate. Simon added that he had not formed a view on this application, and he would go into discussions with an open mind. Simon added that he would take part in the vote.

Stephen Conway and Pauline Jorgensen stated that they had not taken part in some or all of the previously conducted site visits. Both Members added that they would listen to all discussions relating to these items, and would take part in the votes.

36. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

37. DIVERSION OF SHINFIELD FOOTPATH 12

Proposal: Application for the diversion of part of Shinfield Footpath 12 under Section 257 Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Applicant: Shinfield West Housebuilder Consortium

The Committee received and reviewed a report, set out in agenda pages 13 to 20.

The Committee were advised that there were no Members' Updates.

RESOLVED That the order be made.

38. APPLICATION NO.202133 - LAND EAST OF GORSE RIDE SOUTH, SOUTH OF WHITTLE CLOSE AND TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH OF BILLING AVENUE, FINCHAMPSTEAD, RG40 9JF

Proposal: Full planning application for the proposed redevelopment of the existing Gorse Ride South Estate, comprising demolition of existing buildings and replacement with 249 no. dwellings (mixed-tenure flats and houses) together with associated access, parking, landscaping, public open space and drainage

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council c/o Agent: Pegasus Planning Group

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 21 to 76.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Attached printed leaflet with summary information pertaining to the application;

- Clarification that the age of the existing development and its intended functional lifespan were not relevant planning considerations for the purpose of the current application;
- Clarification that the Local Planning Authority would also require a planning obligation in the form of a financial contribution towards local bus service contributions;
- Revision to Condition 16;
- Clarification regarding the affordable housing requirements;
- Substitute wording of Informative 6;
- Additional Informative 17;
- Correction to paragraph 21, to now refer to 88 households.

John Kaiser, Executive Member for Finance and Housing, spoke in favour of the application. John stated that this project would consist of 74 percent affordable housing, with 185 new homes for the community. John added that although Council budgets were under pressure, it was crucially important for this project to move forward. John stated that the current properties were in poor condition, and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) were committed to supporting the local community via provision of high quality homes. John added that this project had been adapted to meet the local need of the area, and the houses would be climate friendly and carbon friendly. John urged the Committee to support the proposals.

Steve Bowers, Chair of the Gorse Ride Residents Steering Group, spoke in support of the application. Steve stated that he had lived on the estate for 36 years, and had raised 5 children, all of whom now owned their own houses. Steve added that he wanted this for future generations, and he wanted people to be proud to live on the estate. Steve stated that the next step for the estate now needed to be taken, and the residents steering group in conjunction with the Parish and Borough Councils, amongst other key parties, were committed to enabling the delivery of this project. Steve added that people needed to be given other opportunities for good quality affordable housing, and he could not emphasise enough just how important this project was for the local area.

Gary Cowan stated that he was supportive of the proposals, and felt that the properties would be delivered in the right area. Gary queried whether affordable housing schemes could apply to former and current military personnel. Simon Weeks stated that key worker lists could be updated to include a variety of groups.

Stephen Conway stated that he was supportive of the proposals. Stephen queried why more apartment blocks were now included within the proposals. Nick Chancellor, case officer, stated that the proposals would be of a higher density when compared to the existing dwellings. Nick added that 4 stories were deemed acceptable, as they were mitigated by public open space, and the sense of openness of the overall site. Nick added that the proposals were acceptable in appearance.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried whether there was bicycle storage in the blocks of flats, whether the properties would be Council owned or managed via a housing association, and why the current properties were not built to last. Nick Chancellor stated that cycle storage would be located within each apartment block. The site would be conveyed to Loddon Homes, which was wholly owned by WBC. Nick added that the site would offer a suitable mix of different types of housing including social rent, discounted rent and shared ownership. Simon Weeks clarified that the current properties were of a Swedish fabricated design, which had a shorter lifespan than more expensive designs.

Simon added that the proposals would be of significantly better quality, and therefore a significantly better lifespan.

Angus Ross queried why condition 24 only stated provision of 40 percent affordable housing, and how contributions towards SANG provision would be devised. Nick Chancellor stated that the 40 percent provision of affordable housing was just the policy requirement, however the proposals would far exceed this amount. Nick stated that the contributions towards SANG provision would only be sought from the uplift in dwellings compared to the current site.

Abdul Loyes stated that he was delighted to see the proposals progressing, and queried whether the roads would be adopted. Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager, confirmed that the roads would be adopted.

Malcolm Richards queried whether lifts would be present in the apartment blocks, queried whether some parking would be provided in clusters, queried whether there would be separate designated areas for electric charging, queried whether cladding would be present on the apartment blocks, and queried whether lighting would be present on all pathways across the site. Nick Chancellor stated that he thought lifts were not proposed within the apartment blocks. Nick stated that car parking would be well distributed across the site, and the site was designed so that allocated parking was close by to dwellings. Some electric charging points would be located on driveway plots, and some within unallocated spaces. The detail of placement of electric vehicle charging point was secured by condition and would come later. The exact materials to be used on the apartment blocks was secured by condition, and would be provided later, however the materials were likely to be a mix of brick, tile brick, and metal balconies. Nick stated that the intention was to illuminate all pathways, and this would form part of landscaping conditions.

Andrew Mickleburgh sought assurance that the garages were suitable for a modern vehicle, and the ban on business and residential usage of the garages would remain permanently. Andrew queried how the energy SAP rating compared to the Gold Standard. Nick Chancellor stated that the garages would be suitable for a modern size car, and the condition regarding acceptable use of the garages would remain in perpetuity unless appealed. Nick added that he could not compare the proposals to the gold Standard rating at this stage, however the properties would be very energy efficient, including features such as district heating of apartment blocks, and home air source heat pumps.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried whether permitted development would be allowed on the proposed dwellings, and queried whether photovoltaic panels would be present on the proposed dwellings. Nick Chancellor confirmed that permitted development would be removed by way of condition. Nick added that he could not confirm whether photovoltaic panels would be included, however it was possible that some would be included.

Committee Members were unanimous in their support for high quality affordable housing projects, such as this application.

RESOLVED That application number 202133 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 22 to 36, revision to condition 16, rewording of informative 6, and addition of informative 17 as set out in the Members' Update.

39. APPLICATION NO.163547 - HOGWOOD PARK, PARK LANE, BARKHAM, WOKINGHAM RG404PT

Simon Weeks and Gary Cowan withdrew from this item and took no part in discussions nor the vote.

Simon Weeks withdrew from the Chair, and Chris Bowring assumed the Chair.

Proposal: HYBRID APPLICATION: Outline application (all matters reserved except access to the site) for up to 140 residential units (Use Class C3) and all associated parking, soft and hard landscaping within the site and ancillary works. (Means of access into the Site off Park Lane, demolition of existing buildings and 2.83ha of SANG to be determined in full detail)

Applicant: Reading Football Club

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 77 to 142.

The Committee were advised that the Members' update included:

- Replacement wording of Condition 26 ;
- Additional Condition 42.

Graeme Dexter, Barkham Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. Graeme stated that the proposals did not fit well with the Arborfield and Barkham neighbourhood plan, nor did it fit with the nearby Hogwood industrial estate. Graeme stated that the extraction fans on the industrial estate were not suitable to be located in close proximity to a residential estate. Graeme added that the site was not located within the existing SDL, and was not in close proximity to local shops. Graeme stated that there would be no direct road access to the district centre, which would force more traffic onto Park Lane, as there was no link to the Nine Mile Ride road extension. Graeme added that it was not possible to safely walk to California Country Park, which would force yet more traffic onto Park Lane. Graeme felt that green areas and landscaping should be used as a buffer between the proposed homes and the industrial estate. Graeme stated that the site required a dedicated link to the nearby SDL, and more SDL infrastructure was required prior to development.

Nina Sharp, agent, spoke in support of the application. Nina stated that this application was in hybrid form, and included up to 140 dwellings and a SANG. Nina added that the site would be vacant from December 2020, and the proposals would provide a safe cycle route to Bohunt School, shops, and community facilities. Nina stated that 5 hectares of public open space would be provided, including a SANG extension. Surface upgrades to the SANG would be secured by a S106 legal agreement, and the site would provide 40 affordable homes. Nina stated that all properties would be of two storey design, with an average density of 27 properties per hectare. Nina concluded by saying that the site was included within the emerging draft local plan, and there had been no objections from statutory consultees regarding this application.

John Kaiser, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. John stated that this was not a sustainable development, and by allowing this development it would allow developments to be built anywhere via precedent. John was of the opinion that there was no highways justification for this application, and this application would set a very dangerous precedent. John stated that this was a case of SDL creep, as the site was 'tacked' on to the edge of an SDL, which was not sustainable. John stated that the

proposals were not in line with the overarching SDL vision, and the access to the site would be via a dangerous and overstretched country road, with no safe crossing point. John was of the opinion that over 1000 jobs and livelihoods could be lost at the Hogwood industrial estate should they be forced to close due to environmental concerns from the proposed residential development. John stated that the site would force residents to drive to shops and amenities, which did not promote the Council's green agenda. John urged the Committee to refuse this application until concerns had been adequately addressed.

Chris Bowring queried the relationship in planning terms between the proposed dwellings and the industrial estate. Sophie Morris, case officer, stated that the nearest property to the industrial estate was located 30m from the industrial estate, and no environmental concerns had been raised during the application stage. Sophie added that the houses in the southern portion of the SDL were located adjacent to the industrial estate. Sophie stated that there would be levels of background noise, however there were no objections based on these grounds.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried what measures would be taken to meet climate emergency objectives, queried whether the roads would be adopted, queried whether the SUDs would be adopted, and queried why only one main entrance and exit was proposed. Sophie Morris stated that a sustainability report would be submitted, with a number of measures intended to be taken forward, at the reserved matters stage. Some features of the development would include photovoltaic panels and solar water heat pumps. Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager, stated that at the outline stage it was too premature to know if the applicant intended to offer the roads or SUDs for adoption, however the S106 agreement would either require adoption or for the roads and SUDs to remain private via a maintenance company with conditions attached. Judy stated that there would be two points of access, one main and one secondary, and the peak projected vehicle movements from the development would equate to 74 vehicle movements per hour on to Park Lane.

Abdul Loyes queried whether the SANG was inside or outside of the red line boundary, queried whether Natural England had objected to an access point from Park Lane, and whether the Education service had commented regarding the impact of the development on school places. Sophie Morris confirmed that the SANG on the application site was located within the red line boundary, with linkages to the existing northern SANG. Detailed discussions had not taken place with Natural England, however a pedestrian / cycle path along Park Lane would result in the loss of some SANG, and it would be very likely that Natural England would not support such a proposal. Sophie added that Bohunt School had not responded to the proposals to date however Education have not raised any issues with the impact on schools.

Angus Ross queried the purpose of the alternate recommendation C, queried if the application was premature based on Wokingham's land supply, and stated that noises and odours were present during the Members site visit. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery, stated that the Committee were being asked to approve all recommendations in from them, with recommendation C allowing delegated refusal in the absence of the agreed S106 contributions. Connor stated that the NPPF was clear that an application could not be refused if it was deemed sustainable, and the assessment considered that the development would be sustainable given its location next to the SDL District Centre. He confirmed it would have been preferable if the site was originally planned and included as part of the wider SDL, however the planned infrastructure to be delivered as part of the wider SDL would make this site sustainable. Sophie Morris stated

that an odour assessment had not been submitted, as this was usually submitted for applications nearby facilities such as a sewage treatment plants. Sophie stated that a condition could be added requiring completion of a satisfactory odour assessment.

Angus Ross suggested that a condition requiring a noise and odour assessment should be added if Members were minded to approve the application.

Malcolm Richards queried whether a smaller width pavement than standard could be installed, as without the option of walking to local shops and amenities, residents would be forced to drive. Judy Kelly stated that although some sections of Park Lane could fit a standard sized pavement, other sections would force the pavement to encroach on green space, and it was therefore not possible to provide a pavement. Sophie Morris added that internal footways within the site would provide a safe and attractive link to Bohunt School.

Pauline Jorgensen queried the density of dwellings per hectare, queried whether green space could potentially be reduced by the applicant should parking not meet standards, sought more details regarding the informal school from off point, and queried what would happen to the bus service provision once the S106 money ran out. Sophie Morris confirmed that the density on site would equate to 27 units per hectare, inclusive of the SANG area. Connor Corrigan confirmed that the SANG could not be reduced in order provide additional car parking. In addition, other green space would be sought to be maintained in order to meet WBC guidelines. Regarding the school drop off point, Connor stated that this would be an informal drop off point, and would allow students to be dropped off safely as currently this occurred within the industrial park, which was not ideal. Judy Kelly stated that S106 monies would be added to top up the Arborfield SDL bus strategy. More money was needed at the beginning of new and improved bus routes whilst passenger numbers were comparatively low due to full SDL housing numbers being in the delivery stage. As additional dwellings were constructed and occupied, bus services would become more profitable and self-sufficient.

Andrew Mickleburgh sought confirmation that it was not a planning consideration to consider what would happen to this site should it not be developed, and queried whether point 12 within the agenda report was contradictory as it stated the proposals were not considered as "so substantial" when they would contribute to a 9.3% increase to the southern SDL area. Connor Corrigan stated that WBC had looked at proposals to take on the site in its current form, however it was not a planning consideration to consider what the site would be should development not occur, and the Committee had to consider the application in front of them. Connor stated that officers had considered the proposals, including capacity of the existing and proposed local amenities, and had deemed the proposals to be sustainable and met the planning tests.

Chris Bowring sought clarification that if the proposals did not cause harm, then their position outside of the SDL was not a planning issue. Connor Corrigan stated that the NPPF was very clear that if a development was sustainable and caused no adverse harm, then they should be approved. Connor added that the planning tests had been looked at, and officers considered them to have passed, with the proposals not causing significant adverse harm.

Stephen Conway was concerned that this application could be considered as premature, and queried whether the development would be sustainable without the infrastructure being present. Connor Corrigan stated that prematurity could not be used as an agreement on sustainable sites and that the same argument could apply to the rest of the

development in the SDL. However the approach is that supporting facilities and services generally come later on which also helps ensure their viability. Sophie Morris stated that reserved matters were yet to come, and they would provide a lot of detail. Sophie added that should this application be approved, reserved matters would be unlikely to return for at least six to twelve months. As such, units may not be developed until 2023, by which time facilities in the wider SDL should be developed.

Angus Ross proposed that standard conditions relating to noise and smell be added, and the results thereof be agreed in conjunction between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the proposer. This was seconded by Chris Bowring, carried, and subsequently added to the list of conditions.

RESOLVED That application number 163547 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 79 to 96, replacement wording of condition 26 and additional condition 42 as set out in the Members' Update, and additional standard conditions related to noise and smell as resolved by the Committee.

40. APPLICATION NO.200711 - BARTLETTS FARM, SWALLOWFIELD ROAD, ARBORFIELD

Simon Weeks resumed the Chair.

Proposal: Full planning application for Installation of a Solar park to include 40000 solar photovoltaic panels, 11 inverter/transformer cabins, a single control building and associated works to include vehicle access and fencing with Environmental Statement.

Applicant: Wessex Solar Energy

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 143 to 174.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included a typographical correction to paragraph 24.

Jonathan Wheelwright, Swallowfield Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. Jonathan stated that Swallowfield Parish Council were in support of climate emergency objectives, however this was the wrong location for a solar farm. Jonathan was of the opinion that this would be more likened to a solar industrial site, built on top of good quality 3A graded agricultural land which was not low quality land. Jonathan stated that it would be hard to find a more visible or intrusive location. Jonathan added that this application had received 89 resident objections, all of who supported the green energy initiative, however not in such an unsuitable location. The site would cover around 46 acres of Greenfield, including installation of approximately 40,000 panels each 8 feet in height. Additional security fencing and outbuildings would also be developed on the Greenfield. Jonathan stated that the fields would be lost to foraging animals, and the alternative site assessment had shown other more suitable sites. Jonathan concluded by stating that sustainable energy was important, however sites should not be placed on good quality farmland, situated in highly visible locations.

Harry Cannon, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Harry stated that he was speaking on behalf of a number of residents, and their view was that this was a good idea, but it was situated in the wrong place. Harry added that this would be a large industrial development located within local countryside on rising ground. As such, the proposals

would be visible for miles around, including from farmland and paths which were used enormously by locals. Harry stated that the proposed development would be located next to listed buildings, and would breach a variety of planning policies and guidelines. Harry stated that one report categorised the views from paths as negligible or minor, which was not the case at all. Harry added that the development would be seen from as far away from Earley, Arborfield and Eversley. Harry concluded by stating that the assessment for alternative sites was incredibly weak, and these proposals would in fact damage the environment by placing an industrial site within the countryside which was valued by residents.

Richard Wearmouth, applicant, spoke in support of the application. Richard stated that this application was for the development of a solar park, and the proposed park was entirely suitable for a site of this scale, in part due to the 33kv powerline running underneath the site. Richard added that the WBC landscape officer had deemed the screening proposals to be appropriate, and the site would see a net ecological gain in the form of hedgerows, trees, and wildflowers. Richard stated that gates would be present to allow for animals such as hedgehogs and badgers to pass through the site safely. Richard added that the proposals would improve drainage in the area, and the flood risk assessment had shown that the proposals would not pose any additional risk when it came to flooding. Natural England had concluded that there was only a limited use for the land, Richard added. Richard stated that the power lines would be located underneath the site, which was desirable for a site of this nature. Richard concluded by stating that this site would not be used indefinitely in the proposed way, and the applicant was not placing an application for an indefinite designation, and the site would be safely decommissioned at the end of the site's lifespan.

Stuart Munro, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Stuart stated that this was a rare occasion whereby he had received quite so many comments in opposition to an application. Stuart added that there was clear support for solar panels and solar farms within the Borough, however the question needed to be answered, could a site be positioned in a more suitable location. Stuart urged the Committee to consider residents' concerns and submissions prior to making a decision.

Simon Weeks sought clarification regarding a number of points raised by speakers, namely whether the existing hedgerow was planned to be reinforced, whether the proposals could be viewed from miles around, and what animals would be present on the site. Mark Croucher, case officer, stated that there were plans to reinforce the existing hedgerows, and this would follow in detail should the application be approved. Mark stated that the western parcel of the site was flat and would be very well screened, and where the ground did rise to the east more distant views would be present, however the visual envelope would still be fairly well contained. Catherine Brimble, Landscape Architect, stated that most views would be contained very locally, with gaps mainly present, through vegetation, footpaths, and gates. Longer distance views could possibly be seen from the north, and middle distance views would be really restricted to existing vegetation. Regarding the animals present on the site, Mark Croucher stated that this would be primarily deer and sheep.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that there was next to nothing presented which gave support to this application. Gary stated that it was very hard to make a judgement regarding the stated low grade land until a high resolution map from Natural England was provided. Gary added that there were no pictures showing the dimensions of the site as it stood. Gary stated that the site elevated considerably, which could lead to views from a

long distance. The highest point of the site was approximately 65m to 70m, with the lowest point being 55m, which showed a considerable 10m to 15m rise across the site. Gary added that the vast majority of the land was good quality 3A as stated by Natural England, which should not be used for proposals such as this. In addition to the plethora of solar panels on site, Gary added that the proposals included hundreds of feet of buildings, some being up to 10 feet in height. Gary stated that planning policies stated that developments in the countryside should seek to protect and enhance the natural landscape, and significant development should only be delivered in areas of poor quality land. Gary was of the opinion that 3A land should be protected, and the proposed 8 foot fence would urbanise a rural location.

It was at this point of the meeting that Simon Weeks proposed the meeting be extended by a maximum of 30 minutes to 11pm. This was seconded by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and carried.

Stephen Conway recognised that this was a difficult recommendation to make for the case officer, as there were a variety of policies going in different directions. Stephen stated that there were a variety of national and local planning policies which suggested that there were problems with this site, including landscape harm and the quality of the agricultural land that would be used. Stephen stated that there appeared to be a lack of information regarding potential alternative sites, and why they were deemed to not be suitable. Stephen suggested that a deferral may be appropriate, in order to receive information regarding alternative sites and how they had been considered. Mark Croucher stated that one of the key benefits of this particular site was the 33kv power line running underneath the ground. Mark added that the climate emergency action plan would require seven solar farm sites of this site in order to achieve its objectives. With that in mind, Mark stated that some impacts were inevitable and other sites had other problems, and therefore there would always be an impact regardless of the location. Mark stated that the Natural England map was broad, and the soil tests were accurate at showing 58 percent of the land was of 3A grade, and 42 percent being 3B or 4 grade, being moderate or poor quality land. Mark added that there were two grades of land which were classified as better land for agricultural purpose than 3A grade.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey was of the opinion that the proposals were a good idea in a reasonable location, and would help Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to achieve its climate emergency agenda.

Abdul Loyes queried how visible the site would be from the highway, and queried whether flooding was a major concern. Mark Croucher stated that cars may see a small view from the bypass. Mark Croucher stated that that the only change to the site's surface would be the stands for the panels to be mounted on. In addition, extra SUDs would be provided.

Malcolm Richards stated that views would not be present from most nearby roads, and the Borough needed a variety of facilities of this scale. Malcolm was of the opinion that stating that the site should be placed somewhere else was not a valid reason for refusal.

Angus Ross was of the opinion that the proposed location was a totally inappropriate site, and grade 3A land should not be used for a solar farm, and therefore the application should be refused.

Chris Bowring stated that he would support a deferral of this application, as the Committee needed to know what the criteria were for site selection, such as profitability, proximity to

the electrical grid, the sightlines, and the weighting applied to all of these considerations. Chris queried whether the Executive's climate emergency declaration had any change on current planning policies. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that the climate emergency declaration did not change planning policy. Justin commented that this site could potentially generate enough energy to accommodate for 5 percent of the Borough's energy needs.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that she was not convinced that the site could potentially be viewed from miles around based on her experience at the site visit. Pauline queried whether the site would be protected in future from a developer stating that the site had been used in an industrial nature, and therefore wanting to place either an industrial site or housing on the land. Mark Croucher confirmed that the change of use would only be granted for 40 years, after which the use would revert to its current form.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether the site had no formal designation, and queried what criteria was used to select sites for renewable energy generation, as these were not allocated within the Local Plan. Mark Croucher stated that the site was deemed as essentially countryside land, rather than a formal designation. Mark stated that Local Plan policy CCO5 set out what would be required in terms of renewable energy. Any of the normal material considerations would be taken into account when looking at an application of this type.

Angus Ross proposed that the application be reduced, on the grounds that the land being used was of high quality agricultural land. This proposal was not seconded, and therefore fell.

Stephen Conway suggested that the application be deferred, to allow for further information to be gathered regarding the assessment and consideration of alternative sites, and why those sites were rejected in favour of the proposed site. Gary Cowan added that the returning information should include better maps and plans that included the profile of the site, rather than just the planned view.

The above suggestion was proposed by Angus Ross, and seconded by Chris Bowring.

RESOLVED That application number 200711 be deferred, to allow for further information to be gathered regarding the assessment and consideration of alternative sites, and why those sites were rejected in favour of the proposed site, and in addition include better maps and plans that included the profile of the site, rather than just the planned view.

41. APPLICATION NO.202103 - LAND AT MAIDENHEAD ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40 5RN

Proposal: Full planning application for the change of use of land from agriculture to the keeping of horses, plus erection of a hay barn and stable building.

Applicant: Mr L Proctor

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 175 to 194.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included a slight variation of wording to Condition 5.

Simon Weeks commented that the application had received no objection, and had received the support of the case officer.

RESOLVED That application number 202103 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 176 to 178, and variation to condition 5 as set out in the Members' Update.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD
HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 5.00 PM TO 6.25 PM**

Present

Charles Margetts	Wokingham Borough Council
Debbie Milligan	NHS Berkshire West CGC
Carol Cammiss	Director, Children's Services
Chris Traill	Director Place and Growth
UllaKarin Clark	Wokingham Borough Council
John Halsall	Wokingham Borough Council
David Hare	Wokingham Borough Council
Susan Parsonage	Chief Executive
Meradin Peachey	Director Public Health – Berkshire West
Matt Pope	Director, Adult Social Care & Health
Katie Summers	Director of Operations, Berkshire West CCG
Jim Stockley	Healthwatch

Also Present:

Madeleine Shopland	Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Ingrid Slade	Consultant in Public Health
Martin Sloan	Assistant Director ASC Transformation and Integration
Lewis Willing	Head of Health and Social Care Integration

25. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Philip Cook and Graham Ebers.

26. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 8 October 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at a future date.

27. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

28.1 Ann Dally asked the Chairman of the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board the following question which was answered by the Vice Chairman:

Question

We welcome the founding of a Recovery College in Wokingham and the Council's farsightedness in thus providing such a wide range of support and information to those recovering from poor mental health; and would like to know how the council plans to inform

as many residents as possible that they are eligible to attend courses at the Recovery College?

We look forward to your confirmation of the arrangements in due course

Answer

The Recovery College is available for Wokingham residents over the age of 18 years. The courses are currently online until it is safe to use community venues to deliver courses face to face.

In terms of advertising the courses and promoting the Recovery College we've made contact and shared information with several local individuals and organisations including Citizen's Advice, Sports in Mind, Unlock your Wellbeing, Berkshire West Your Way, TuVida, Compass (Reading RC), Depression Xpression (peer support group), Optalis Supported Employment Service, Healthwatch and the CCG.

The Recovery College team has worked with the Communication Team for Wokingham Borough Council. There has been a news release on the Recovery College and this is being followed up by a social media post. The team are also working on a case study of a student who has used the college to share their experience.

The service was promoted in a CCG newsletter, the project was also promoted in newsletters by Involve and TuVida. If residents use Google to search for the Recovery College it now comes up first. There is a new prospectus available shortly listing the courses and this will appear under the mental health section on Wokingham Borough Council's website.

Supplementary Question:

Are there any plans for partnership working with say the CMHT, in the future, and Community Navigators? Maybe direct referrals with patients' consent to the Recovery College?

Supplementary Answer:

I can answer from the health side of things. So, certainly with the social prescribers, they work really closely with the voluntary services to know what is out there, so they are a great resource of diverting people to these courses directly. There is also a pilot happening in Wokingham West Plus, which is covering the Brookside, Chalfont, Lower Earley area, where the unitaries are working with the GP practices to refer these patients into these services as well. CMHT are really good about looking at these resources and using the voluntary sector, and education in every way possible. I like to think that we have got it covered.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

30. COVID UPDATE

Ingrid Slade provided the Board with an update on Covid.

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

- There had been 39 new cases in the Borough that day (as at 7 December). This represented a rise up to 142 per 100,000.

- Information showed that cases were increasing as lockdown had been announced and had then decreased and plateaued during lockdown. Following the lifting of lockdown, cases had begun to rise. Wokingham Borough was echoing the picture of the South East. The South East rate had now exceeded that of the national rate.
- It was expected that the daily case rate would continue to rise and then hopefully plateau.

RESOLVED: That the Covid update be noted.

31. STRATEGY INTO ACTION

The Board considered the Strategy into Action.

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

- Ingrid Slade updated on the three action groups created around the health and wellbeing strategy priorities. The Groups were trying to capture activity that was currently not being reported in their respective areas and encouraging collaboration with partners.
- With regards to the Physically Active Communities Group, its work was very much on track. The group had met for the first time that week and was co-chaired by Sports and Leisure and Public Health. Information had already come out of the meeting such as the fact that Dinton Pastures had taken part in a national evaluation of the effect of sailing on children's educational attainment. The meeting had helped to identify where the gaps in knowledge about partners' work were, and also where there was potential overlap and collaboration opportunities.
- The reporting outcomes for the Reducing Social Isolation group were less clear than others. This was co-chaired by Public Health and Phil Cook, Involve. The group had met for the first time that week and had identified areas of overlap and potential gaps. The group had perhaps the largest work to do in terms of identifying the current landscape of social isolation and loneliness, and where most progress could be made. The group was next due to meet in January.
- The third group, Narrowing Health Inequalities, was co-chaired by Public Health and Children's Services and was due to meet for the first time in January.
- Good progress was being made. Further discussions would be had about how best to establish a reporting system for reporting into the Board and to other partners.
- Councillor Hare asked whether LINK had been included in the Reducing Social Isolation Group as they had a valuable contribution to make. Martin Sloan commented that Phil Cook chaired the Friendship Alliance which included the LINK, and their focus was tackling social isolation.
- Dr Milligan asked whether the social prescribers working in Primary Care were being linked in to the Reducing Social Isolation Group. She also asked whether the Clinical Commissioning Group and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust would be involved in the Narrowing Health Inequalities Group. Ingrid Slade confirmed that this was the case.
- Councillor Halsall commented that a lot of work was being carried out regarding social isolation.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the progress in the establishment of three Action Groups as outlined in the accompanying presentation (Appendix A), to deliver on the Wellbeing Board objectives, be reviewed;

- 2) further input from Board members on these Action Groups and progress to date, be invited;
- 3) it be noted that the summary of the progress captured to the end of November. These short summary reports will remain in place until formal reporting is implemented.

32. WOKINGHAM INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS UPDATE

Lewis Willing provided the Wokingham Partnerships Update.

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

- The coming winter had required the Council and its partners to develop several winter plans, including the Better Care Winter Pressures Plan, and the Covid Adult Social Care Plan. Plans had been submitted on time to the Department of Health and Social Care. System partners felt that generally the Partnership was well prepared and organised to meet all the key areas of the plans.
- The plans had resulted in extra services being developed, with teams around the health and social care system to be expanded as required.
- A Voluntary Community Sector mental health pilot had recently begun. Using a Population Health Management approach, it had been noted that there was an increase in the number of people reporting issues with their mental health as a result of Covid. The pilot had begun with the Citizens Advice Bureau, offering support in dealing with some of the causes of mental health problems, such as debt advice, and offering onward referral to other voluntary mental health organisations.
- The Population Health Management approach was used to help direct local projects and was best practice. A Population Health Management Analyst would be employed to support work.
- There would be an increase in Primary Care social workers to support an increase in the frequency of Multi Disciplinary Team meetings. Increased social work presence would allow Primary Care Network leaders to have a 'go-to' person for support with social care and allow for regular meetings with social prescribers and the voluntary sector and Primary Care Network leaders.
- The Wokingham Integrated Partnership had also agreed to fund an enhanced medical capacity in the Consultant Geriatrician team. The second wave of the pandemic had already had a huge impact on the need for geriatrician support for hospital type treatments, including O2 and Dexamethasone, which allowed Covid positive patients with compromised respiratory function to remain in their place of residence. The additional hours would also enable Multi-Disciplinary Teams to have access to Geriatrician advice on complex or challenging cases.
- There were a small number of occasions when people were delayed in being discharged from hospital, or ended up becoming a Non-Elective Admission, as they needed extra support with medication only calls. Better Care Fund Winter Pressures finances had been made available to fund these calls.
- The Cancer Champion scheme developed by Involve would continue to be supported.
- The Home from Hospital service would be increased and would now be available 7 days. The number of hours that the service was in operation and the duration of the support offer would also be increased.
- Following the first wave of Covid 19, it had been established that care providers in the community (in both care homes and home care) would benefit from further

infection control nursing support. This was being put in place across Berkshire West.

- Councillor Hare commented that he had seen an advert in Oxfordshire Mind, for the position of Primary Care Wellbeing Project Manager for Wokingham. He questioned whether they would support those with stress and anxiety. Lewis Willing stated that they would and that it was a new post.
- Martin Sloan indicated that there was the mental health pilot in the Earley plus area. In addition, a tender had been put out to fund a Voluntary Community Sector partner with mental health expertise. Oxfordshire Mind had been appointed and it was hoped that a team would be in place by February.
- Dr Milligan commented that a huge amount of work had been undertaken and that it was good to talk about mental health in equivalent terms to physical health.
- Katie Summers agreed that it was good to see successful partnership working and commented that the message of 'One team' needed to be celebrated. She was pleased that the benefits of the Population Health Management methodology were being seen. She felt that there needed to be a greater focus on children and young people going forwards. Katie Summers would be working closely with Nicky Cartwright, the Director of Joint Commissioning and invited the Director of Children's Services to work with them to share the learning that had been undertaken in the adult's forum and to begin to replicate it for children and young people. Carol Cammiss welcomed this. Katie Summers commented that she wanted to be able to talk about the 'household approach' rather than adults and children and young people, separately.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

33. CCG OPERATING PLAN

The Board considered the CCG Operating Plan.

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

- Katie Summers indicated that the Plan had been created in March and sent to NHS England in May.
- The landscape had changed significantly as a result of Covid. Katie Summers commented that she wanted to provide assurance that whilst some of the work programmes had had to be reprioritised, priorities were still being delivered albeit at a slower pace than initially anticipated.

RESOLVED: That the CCG Operating Plan be noted.

34. JOINT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY UPDATE

Meradin Peachey introduced the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy update:

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

- It had been over a year since it had been agreed that a joint Berkshire West Strategy would be developed.
- The Strategy had changed as a result of the dealing with and recovery from Covid. Also, the NHS was changing – the Integrated Care Partnership, the 'Place' at Berkshire West level was becoming more important. The Strategy needed to be seen in the context of driving the work of the Integrated Care Partnership as well as

the work of the Wellbeing Boards and as a reference for organisations such as the Police for driving improvements.

- Meradin Peachey felt that it should not be called a Joint Health Wellbeing Strategy and that 'Happier, healthier Berkshire was more appropriate, and reflected the partnership.
- It was anticipated that there would be 3-5 overarching strategy statements and that each agency and Wellbeing Board would then develop their own priorities.
- Matt Pope suggested that an informal Wellbeing Board be held in January to discuss local prioritisation and how the priorities could be shaped for Wokingham. Dr Milligan suggested that the Primary Care Network Clinical Directors be invited to participate in this.
- Katie Summers suggested that Reading and West Berkshire be involved later in the process. John Halsall commented that Wokingham had struggled with resources and that he did not want the work being done to be watered down. There were different authorities with very different demographics. Resources needed to be used in the best possible way. Dr Milligan emphasised that whilst there would be a steer from the Berkshire West group it would need to work for Wokingham.
- Katie Summers suggested that James Kent, ICS Lead & Accountable Officer for BOB CCGs be invited to a future meeting.
- Meradin Peachey emphasised that there was a clear direction for the Berkshire West system.
- Sarah Rayfield indicated that possible priorities had been identified through talking to stakeholders across Berkshire West, and by reviewing data by population need.
- Last week a public engagement piece had begun which would help to refine the priorities, which had been produced by a number of partners including Healthwatch Wokingham, Involve and the Wokingham Public Health team. There was an online survey and also focus groups that were targeted at more vulnerable individuals including adults with learning disabilities and carers. There would be 3 virtual public meetings in January which would be open to all. The Chairs of voluntary organisations and also Town and Parish Councils, had also been contacted. It was recognised that the runup to Christmas was a potentially difficult time to engage with people, however the voluntary sector needed adequate time to engage.
- It was intended that the Strategy would have around 3 priorities and that a draft would be produced for March.
- The Strategy would reflect the population need for Wokingham although there would be some shared actions across Berkshire West, where there was merit to do so.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy be noted.

35. BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP WEST BERKSHIRE, WOKINGHAM AND READING

Carole Cammiss provided a presentation on the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership: West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading.

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

- Alan Wood had been commissioned by the Department for Education to lead a review of the effective of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards on the outcomes for children. This took place between January and March 2016 and concluded that most Safeguarding Children Board arrangements had difficulty demonstrating their value in improving outcomes for children.

- Working Together 2018 guidance replaced Local Safeguarding Boards (LSCBs) with flexible equitable safeguarding partnership being designed by the Local Authority, Police and Clinical Commissioning Groups.
- The three LSCBs in Berkshire West merged in July 2018.
- The 'new' multi-agency partnership arrangements were agreed in March 2019 and implemented in June 2019. They were now known as the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP)
- Carol Cammiss outlined some of the things that were different under the new arrangements:
 - new role of Independent Scrutineer as there was no longer an Independent Chair;
 - Statutory Safeguarding Partners met as an Executive Group 3 times per year but had contact in between the meetings to ensure any significant Berkshire West issues could be discussed and resolved;
 - 2/3 Children's Leaders Forums per year, wider partnership meetings, to share learning and good practice and the experience of children and practitioners across the Berkshire West partnership;
 - Education Safeguarding Engagement Group in each area to ensure school leaders could directly feed into safeguarding discussions;
 - responsibility for safeguarding sits with all of us and not with a separate body or Independent Chair.
- Carol Cammiss went on to highlight some of the similarities that remained including continuing to share key safeguarding responsibilities across Berkshire.
- Carol Cammiss emphasised some of the positive elements of the new arrangements such as a good level of attendance and support from partners. It was noted that Sir Alan Wood had been impressed with the arrangements and that the Partnership would feature as a 'good' model in a future report.
- The Board noted some of the key achievements of the partnership, including the locally devised and produced 'Be Brave – Speak up' online campaign which had reached 81,824 (with a total number of impressions being 522,445 being watched an average 6.3 times) and been shared 207 times on Facebook.
- Councillor Hare asked about the effects of Covid. Carol Cammiss indicated that there had been an increased in non-accidental injuries in babies and toddlers. The overall effect of Covid on children's mental health and development would not be known for some time. Children's Services was working with Public Health to think about how those who had been impacted by Covid could be supported.
- Dr Milligan emphasised that as a clinician, learning from case reviews was vital. She questioned whether the 'Speak up – Be Brave' campaign should be run again.

RESOLVED: That the presentation on the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership: West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading, be noted.

36. DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT

The Board considered the Director Public Health Annual Report.

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

- The report focused on recovery as a result of Covid and its impact on society. Public health had looked at disasters around the world such as the Ebola outbreak in Africa, the Grenfell fire and the Australian bush fires, and how the recovery from those might help deal with some of the problems that were likely to be encountered, and some of the solutions.

- Meradin Peachey hoped that the document would be a reference document that would be used to develop health and wellbeing priorities.
- Meradin Peachey highlighted a number of problems that were likely to be faced following the pandemic such as increased morbidity and mental health problems.
- It was highlighted that the accommodation and food industry in Berkshire had had the largest number of staff furloughed.
- The last few chapters of the report dealt with resilience and social cohesion and what were the community assets that could be used to help aid recovery and to assist communities to support themselves.
- The last chapter discussed how change could be measured.
- Katie Summers asked whether the report would be presented to the Integrated Care Partnership Unified Executive and the CCG Governing Body. Meradin Peachey indicated that she would be happy to take the report there bearing in mind the current focus on vaccination.
- Dr Milligan commented that the report was easy to read and thanked Tessa Lindfield for her work.
- In response to a question from Susan Parsonage, Meradin Peachey stated that there were a lot of community asset type family indicators that could be used to measure how healthy the community was.
- Katie Summers questioned whether information could be broken down by ward level for children's services. Carol Cammiss indicated that she had had initial discussions with Public Health and the Digital Team about how to access data and to make it meaningful and usable for service design and delivery.

RESOLVED: That the Director of Public Health Annual Report be noted.

37. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Board discussed the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year.

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

- There were no changes made to the forward programme.
- Dr Milligan and Katie Summers gave an update on the Covid vaccination programme.
- Dr Milligan indicated that she had undertaken a site visit to one of the vaccination sites that morning, and that it was nearly ready to go. She thanked Katie Summers and her team for their work to ensure that the relevant IT was in place.
- Practices were contacting their patients who were over 80 for the vaccination. Two doses were required 21 days apart. Appointments for both doses were being booked. She advised that the date of appointments was currently provisional until the vaccination was physically received at the practice.
- It was hoped that the first wave of vaccinations would begin next week. Staff from various practices would go to the vaccination centre to help vaccinate patients.
- Dr Milligan would be undertaking site visits for vaccination sites in the other areas of the Borough.
- There was strict national guidance and over 80's who were physically able to get to a practice would be vaccinated first. The public were asked not to phone the surgeries to ask when they would receive the vaccine as it would potentially overwhelm phonelines. Patients would be contacted by the surgeries when appropriate.
- As different vaccines came on board processes might change.

- Katie Summers advised that there were three main delivery channels that would be utilised:
 - Primary care
 - Providers – Royal Berkshire Hospital and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust would look to vaccinate their own staff.
 - Working with the local authorities to establish a small number of possible mass vaccination sites.
- There were ten Primary care Network sites across Berkshire West, five of which were in the Borough.
- Councillor Hare commented that the Pfizer vaccine was too volatile to be taken to care homes, so they were not appropriate vaccination sites at the moment. Dr Milligan commented that if care home residents could travel to the vaccination site, they would still be able to receive the vaccination. Carers would be vaccinated before healthcare workers.
- It was noted that those having the vaccination would be expected to wait 15 minutes after they had received their vaccination, to ensure that they did not have an allergic reaction. Each practice would deal with this differently.
- In response to a question from Councillor Hare, Dr Milligan confirmed that those who had epi-pens should not be invited to have the vaccination. Katie Summers commented that the prescribing team would send a list out to all of the practices to flag up which patients had epi-pens.
- Patients would receive a text advising them when they could make an appointment to visit a vaccination site. It would be a long process.
- Martin Sloan indicated that the local authority was working with the Clinical Directors to see whether volunteers could be provided to the vaccine sites. Wokingham Volunteer Centre were looking to actively recruit volunteers to help marshal patients in and out of the buildings. Councillor Halsall indicated that an extraordinary Executive had been scheduled to agree the funding for this exercise.
- Katie Summers emphasised the importance of making every contact count. Dr Milligan commented that physical contact needed to be reduced as large numbers of patients would be dealt with. Martin Sloan indicated that there was a need to be practical about what could be achieved through the support with marshalling.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

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**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Stuart Munro and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Officers Present

Madeleine Shopland
Connor Corrigan
Judy Kelly
Mary Severin
Justin Turvey
Catherine Brimble

Case Officers Present

Nick Chancellor
Mark Croucher
Jeanette Davey
Graham Vaughan

42. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

43. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

44. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

There were no applications to be deferred or withdrawn.

**45. APPLICATION NO.201515 - ASHRIDGE FARM, WARREN HOUSE ROAD,
WOKINGHAM, RG40 5QB**

Proposal: Full application for the erection of 153 dwellings comprising a mix of 1,2,3 & 4 beds with associated landscaping, parking, open space, drainage; construction of a new access onto Warren House Road and Bell Foundry Lane; provision of an area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and all other associated development works (including demolition of existing buildings and provision of temporary site sales).

Applicant: Barratt David Wilson Homes

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 5 to 74.

The Committee was advised that the Members' Update included the following:

- Amendment of the cited Heads of Terms on Pages 8 and 25;
- Amendment of condition 2, to include the list of drawings to be approved;

- Amendment of condition 25 regarding stream alignment;
- Amendment of condition 37 regarding odour mitigation measures;
- Additional conditions 45 and 46;
- Clarification regarding parking space number and parking ratio;
- Additional consultation responses;
- Clarification regarding the installation of acoustic screens around the Odour Control Unit in order to address the noise issues associated with this, in order for it to commence use again.

Abby Tebboth, Wokingham Town Council, spoke in objection to the application. She stated that the Town Council was concerned about the odour levels coming from the sewage works. The odour contouring had been noted but the Odour Impact Assessment still predicted that odour exposures across the site would potentially be two or three times the level at which odour became a nuisance, which would have a significant impact on residents' use of their homes, gardens and the amenity space. Abby Tebboth went on to state that the proximity of the housing to Ashridge Stream presented a considerable flood risk even if the diversion works were completed. An area of the development was in the high level of flood risk, which was not in line with the Core Strategy. She added that there was an increased risk of flooding to the existing houses in the area. Abby Tebboth indicated that residents had concerns around the safety of the access to Warren House Road, to the playpark and the SANG, to existing houses. Increased pressure on local infrastructure was also potentially an issue. Abby Tebboth went on to state the application would develop some of the only remaining green space in Norreys.

Jessica Sparkes, spoke in favour of the application, on behalf of the Applicant. She commented that the proposals had been shaped following extensive discussions with officers and consultees. The number of dwellings now aligned with the emerging Local Plan, landscaping and open space were now increased and overall density on a par with other developments in the Strategic Development Location. Jessica Sparkes indicated that the application would allow for the completion of the Northern Distributor Road and that additional SANG and public open space would also be provided, which would complement the existing SANG across the north of Wokingham. The proposals also offered policy compliant affordable housing all of which would be provided within the development. Jessica Sparkes commented that the proposals gave regard to the water treatment works to the north and Listed Building to the south. She highlighted that Thames Water had not raised an objection to the proposals, had confirmed that the layout accorded with the recent odour report and that no further works were required from their perspective. In addition, Historic England had not submitted an objection and the applicant had sought to enhance the views that would be possible from the new public open space to the listed building by providing wide open space at the centre of the site for the veteran trees, a planted orchard and by retaining a granary building which would enhance the character of the open space at the centre of the site.

Malcolm Richards commented that the application would enable the completion of the Northern Distributor Road, which was positive.

Malcolm Richards questioned whether there was a Construction Management Plan. Judy Kelly confirmed that there would.

Malcolm Richards commented that there were three entry points to the development, but the plans suggested that the development was in two separate halves. He asked whether the roads allowed travel from one side of the development to the other. He went on to ask

about the internal road width and if they would be sufficiently wide for the predicted volume of traffic. In addition, Malcolm Richards asked if there would be pavements or shared spaces throughout the development. Connor Corrigan confirmed that there were two halves to the development with a linkage road through the middle. Judy Kelly added that the linkage road was more an emergency link and that there would be bollards in place and would be pedestrian and cycle only. The site accesses had been subject to road safety audits and no particular issues had been identified. With regards to road widths, Judy Kelly indicated that they would vary, but would generally be between 5-6m. A swept path exercise had been successfully carried out using a Council refuse vehicle. Judy Kelly added that there would be some shared spaces, such as at the end of cul-de-sacs, otherwise footpaths would be on one or both sides of the roads.

Malcolm Richards queried what percentage of the development was at high risk of flooding. Connor Corrigan stated that land to the south of the NDR was in Zones 1 and 2 and the realignment of the stream would create betterment and would put the development in Zone 1, which was acceptable. North of the NDR would flood but was open space, which was again considered acceptable. He informed Members that the Environment Agency had a standing objection to the timing of the development. They had wanted the flood modelling to be undertaken after the alignment of the stream. However, following discussions, the Environment Agency was satisfied with revised condition 25.

Malcolm Richards asked about the odour control system and potential noise and odour resulting from it. Connor Corrigan commented that Officers had relied on Thames Water and Environmental Health to look at the odour report. A detailed Odour Modelling Assessment had been produced by an independent consultant appointed by Thames Water. The odour control system had reduced the amount of odour on site. Noise mitigation and screening would be put in to mitigate against any noise issues.

In response to a question from Malcolm Richards, Judy Kelly stated that there would be 238 allocated parking spaces and 60 unallocated or visitor spaces.

Simon Weeks sought clarification on the safety of the access points. Judy Kelly confirmed that they had been subject to a Stage 1 Road Safety Audit.

Stephen Conway noted that some of the public open space was within Zone 3 of the odour contour map, and questioned whether there was a risk of the public open space becoming unusable on some occasions. He also queried potential odour nuisance beyond Zone 3. Simon Weeks commented that approximately 75% of the time the prevailing wind was from the south west to the north east. Connor Corrigan added that the odour contour mapping was based on the level of complaints received. The number of dwellings proposed had responded to the odour contour mapping zone. There was enough open space to ensure that people did not have stand in an area on occasions when it was particularly odorous. Stephen Conway added that sewage treatment works were usually situated away from housing developments. As development in the area increased so would the pressure on the sewage treatment system.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey questioned whether prospective residents would be informed of the sewage treatment works prior to purchase. Connor Corrigan commented that anyone visiting the development would be able to see the site.

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey sought clarification as to how bad flooding would potentially be and how flooding control on the site would work. Connor Corrigan indicated that the site

was designed with SUDS in place. It was for the applicant to decide how they were managed but they could decide to hand it over to the Council to manage should they wish. The drainage system would be improved by the betterment of the stream.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked whether there would be crossings on the NDR to enable crossing to Cantley. Connor Corrigan stated that there were two crossings and that Cantley was a key destination. A Walking and Cycling Strategy condition sought a new pedestrian crossing to Cantley, which would also benefit the residents of the Kentwood Development. There would be cycleways and footpaths and Cantley would have a new cycleway. A S106 contribution was in place to improve pedestrian and cycleway connectivity. Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey queried if the cycleway would be shared or separate and was informed that it would be shared.

Carl Doran welcomed the provision of 35% affordable housing on site. He went on to question the tenure split (50% social rent, 20% affordable rent and 30% shared ownership) and if it was strictly policy compliant. Connor Corrigan stated that the tenure split had been worked up with the Affordable Housing team based on local need. There was a good mixture of provision across North Wokingham. Carl Doran felt that there should be more 1 and 2 bedroom homes.

With regards to odour, Carl Doran queried whether there had been changes to the sewage treatment centre over the last ten years. He pointed out that the North Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document said that the sewage treatment works may exclude residential development in the Ashridge Farm area, due to odours, and that rigorous testing would be required. He questioned whether this testing had been carried out. Connor Corrigan indicated that the sewage works had had a major upgrade. The SDL originally did not include the site as it was seen as a constraint. However, when sites were allocated, it was done on a high-level basis. Industry standard testing had been carried out by an independent contractor with regards to odour.

Carl Doran continued to raise concerns regarding potential odour. He commented that the highest exposure levels were in the south of the site where the preliminary and primary effluent treatment took place. The odour control unit did not cover this area. Connor Corrigan responded that Environmental Health and Thames Water had not objected to the application. Environmental Health had received two complaints regarding odour in 2015 and one in 2019.

Andrew Mickleburgh asked what the minimum road width was in the development and if it was adequate to ensure that there was no parking on verges and pavements. Judy Kelly stated the minimum road width was generally 5m although there was a very small section of private road that would be 4.5m. She did not envisage issues with parking.

Andrew Mickleburgh went on to ask about flooding in the SANG and how often it was anticipated that the SANG would flood and require closure. Connor Corrigan confirmed that there would be a degree of flooding. The waster course fed into the Emm Brook. However, there was sufficient space to ensure that the SANG would not become unusable.

Andrew Mickleburgh referred to air quality and air pollution. He expressed concern regarding the cumulative impact of increased vehicle movements along Warren House Road and Wiltshire Road. Connor Corrigan indicated that the NDR would actually take traffic off the current route.

Pauline Jorgensen asked whether the estate to the left by the lagoon had experienced issues with odour. Connor Corrigan clarified that no complaints had been received from the new developments.

Pauline Jorgensen queried whether the roads would be built to adoptable standards. Judy Kelly stated that they would. An obligation was being secured in the Heads of Terms for the Section 106, for the developer to either complete a Section 38 Highways Adoption Agreement, or enter into a separate private roads Section 106 Agreement prior to commencement of development.

Pauline Jorgensen commented that the standards for cycleways were changing and that there was now a presumption in favour of separate cycleways. She questioned if there could be a condition that where appropriate, cycleways be separate. Judy Kelly suggested that condition 29 be refined to reflect this.

Pauline Jorgensen went on to ask if there would be hedgerow replacement. She was informed that there would be reprovision of the hedgerows to link in the SANGs.

Simon Weeks commented that to the north of the NDR was the proposed SANG, linking to SANGs in the east and west. Beyond that between the SANG and the proposed route of the NDR was additional recreational ground. He sought clarification as to why this recreation ground had not been included. Connor Corrigan reminded the Committee that only a certain amount of SANG was required to meet policy requirements. Any greater would incur greater maintenance costs. Pauline Jorgensen questioned whether it would be protected from future development, and was informed that it would be.

Chris Bowring commented that the odour report was a technical document and should be taken into account as such.

RESOLVED: That application 201515 be approved subject to the completion of a S106 agreement inclusive of the following Heads of Terms set out on page 8 of the agenda, conditions and informatives as set out in pages 8 to 25 of the agenda, amended condition 29, and the additional conditions and amended conditions as detailed within the Members' Update.

46. APPLICATION NO. 201573 - BOUNDOAK INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, WOKINGHAM LANE, ARBORFIELD, RG2 9PN

Proposal: Full application for the erection of 4No buildings for B1c,B2 and B8 industrial and commercial use with the addition of a sui generis Energy Centre comprising a Combined Heat and Power facility and a Lithium Ion Battery store in Unit 1 to include landscaping and access works, following demolition of the existing buildings.

Applicant: Musketeer Properties Ltd

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 75 to 120.

The Committee was advised that the Members' Update included the following:

- Amendment to condition 4 in order to allow up to two units to be occupied by the same tenant;

- Amendment to condition 16 around walking and cycling.

Douglas Bond, agent, spoke in support of the application. He stated that the site was currently an unattractive, poor quality estate which needed development. The application would result in an improvement for tenants and employees. Amended plans had been submitted to allay the concerns of residents. The proposed layout was sensitive to surroundings and allowed important trees to be retained, in addition to opportunities for new native planting. The Countryside Officer had concluded that the application would result in a minor beneficial effect to the wildlife. Douglas Bond also commented that there would be sufficient onsite parking. He went on to refer to improved sustainability features. He emphasised that the proposals also included provision for an energy centre, which enhanced the scheme's sustainability credentials.

In response to a question from Gary Cowan, Judy Kelly explained that there was a pelican crossing for pedestrians on the A327M, the main strategic road to the east of the site. There was also a bridleway (Pegasus crossing). There was bridleway that came down to the north and to the west of the site there was a byway that continued on. Residents had expressed concern that the uncontrolled pedestrian crossing was not well constructed. A condition sought to improve this and a dropped kerb crossing with tactile paving would be put in place, with a continuous footway leading into the site.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried the number of parking spaces, including for trucks. Judy Kelly indicated that the site usage would be a mixture of B1, C, B2 and B8 which had different parking standards. However, parking standards would be met. There were no specific parking places for trucks on site.

With regards to control of noise, Angus Ross questioned whether conditions were strong enough to control any future occupants and usages. Jeanette Davey indicated that usage should not exceed prevailing background noise at the nearest residential property or noise sensitive property.

Malcolm Richards queried the machinery operating times beginning at 7am. Jeanette Davey commented that the applicant had originally requested longer working hours. Condition 21 covered the adjoining residents.

Malcolm Richards stated that the lithium-ion battery store would be vulnerable to fire risk. Jeanette Davey emphasised that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had indicated that the relevant fire legislation would need to be complied with in order for a Fire Safety Order to be achieved.

Simon Weeks commented that there was currently encroachment on the wildlife as a result of the tipping of waste. Douglas Bond confirmed that this would be addressed.

RESOLVED: That application 201573 be approved subject to completion of a legal agreement and conditions and informatives as set out in pages 76 to 89, and revised conditions 4 and 16 as detailed in the Members' Update.

At this point in the meeting, 9.45pm, Gary Cowan left the meeting.

47. APPLICATION NO.200700 - 1, BARKHAM ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG41 2XR

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 14 flats, 6 no. one bedroom flats, 8 no. two bedroom flats, car parking and landscaping, following the demolition of existing buildings.

Applicant: Cleanslate Ltd

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 121 to 156.

The Committee was advised that the Members' Update included the following:

- Additional condition around hours of work.

A statement was read out on behalf of Brian Norton, applicant, in support of the application. The applicant had held a Pre-Application process and met with Planning Officers and Landscaping Officers. They had had a constructive dialogue which had resulted in a number of modifications to the proposals; namely reducing its scale, improving external design features to meet the local vernacular and bolstering landscaping given its location on a Green Route. In addition, plants that bolstered biodiversity, had been selected. Although the Heritage Officer had, early in the process, expressed concern around the existing building's history, very little of the original features remained and redevelopment was the only practical option. There were some significant viability challenges due to technical requirements for remediation and poor ground conditions leading to a potential need for piling. Despite these challenges several shared ownership flats were offered as part of the development.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. She commented that on the whole she welcomed the application. However, she felt that the inclusion of a lift would make the building more accessible for all. Imogen Shepherd-DuBey questioned why solar panels were not part of the application. In addition, she felt that more visitor parking was required and that at least one more flat should be affordable housing.

Pauline Jorgensen sought clarification regarding the private open space in front of the flats and queried whether the landscaping was adequate. Janette Davey indicated that originally it had been proposed that the space in front of the flats would be communal open space. It was now private space for five of the flats. There was a proposal for a brick wall and planting against the brick wall which would offer a degree of privacy. Officers were keen that the proposals complied with the government's provisions for building a healthy life, seeking to achieve outdoor space in some form for as many residents as possible. This had been achieved in eleven of the fourteen dwellings. With regards to the private garden space, Officers had felt it appropriate in the location.

Malcolm Richards asked whether there was sufficient space for refuse vehicles to access. Judy Kelly indicated that larger vehicles would reverse in and then come back out on to the road in a forward manner.

Malcolm Richards commented that a lift would be useful. Janette Davey clarified that this was not something which could be required under planning legislation. Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey questioned there could be an informative regarding encouraging the inclusion of a lift.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked how the contaminated land would be treated and was informed that this was addressed in conditions five to eight.

Stephen Conway commented that there was a lack of amenity space and that the majority of amenity space was provided as balconies. Jeanette Davey stated that eleven out of fourteen dwellings had some form of outside space. There was also nearby outdoor space in the form of allotments, a play park and Elms Field.

A number of Members were of the opinion that the affordable homes provision was insufficient. The requirement for the location was 20%, however only two dwellings would be affordable housing. It was noted that the viability study had indicated that two as opposed to three was acceptable.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried how density compared to other developments. Jeanette Davey confirmed that the application complied with policy requirements.

Andrew Mickleburgh expressed concern regarding parking and questioned the impact on the surrounding area. Judy Kelly responded that the parking would be unallocated. There was a requirement for thirteen spaces and the applicant would be providing fourteen parking spaces. The area in the vicinity had heavy parking restrictions so she would not anticipate overspill into these areas. Visitors could make use of nearby car parks such as at the station.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried the access point on to the already congested Barkham Road and questioned whether access on to Oxford Road would be more appropriate. He was informed that there was existing access on to Barkham Road and the application would actually reduce the intensification of access. There were one-way restrictions on Oxford Road which may have made it less desirable to the applicant and future residents.

Abdul Loyes asked what the minimum requirements for the gross internal area were. Janette Davey commented that policy TBO7 had standards for one-bedroom flats occupied by two people and two-bedroom flats occupied by three people. A one-bedroom flat should be a minimum 50m² and a two bedroom flat, a minimum of 61m².

RESOLVED: That application 200700 be approved subject to the completion of a legal agreement pursuant to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to secure provision of affordable housing and an Employment Skills Plan, conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 122 to 129, the proposed additional condition set out in the Members' Update and the additional informative discussed at the meeting.

48. CONTINUATION OF MEETING

At this point in the meeting 10.25pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 8.2.9, the Committee considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm, up to no later than 11pm, to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. This was proposed by Chris Bowring and seconded by Simon Weeks.

RESOLVED That the meeting be extended past 10.30pm, up to no later than 11pm, to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted.

49. APPLICATION NO.192884 - LAND AT STANBURY HOUSE, BASINGSTOKE ROAD, SPENCERS WOOD

Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of agricultural land to recreational use (D2 Use class) (to provide a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) with associated access, car park, footpaths and landscaping works.

Applicant: Cooper Estates Strategic Land Limited

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 157 to 182.

The Committee was advised that the Members' Update included the following:

- Additional consultation response from WBC Green Infrastructure;
- Additional condition around hours of work.

In response to question from Angus Ross, Graham Vaughn confirmed that condition 10 referred to the provision of a footpath link between the footpath network within the site and Shinfield Byway 25, Woodcock Lane.

RESOLVED: That application 192884 be approved subject to completion of a legal agreement to secure ownership of the land for recreational use as a SANG; its maintenance in perpetuity by the Local Authority; and, a commuted sum towards maintenance, conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 158 to 163, and additional condition as set out in the Members' Update.

50. APPLICATION NO 200711 BARTLETTS FARM, SWALLOWFIELD ROAD, ARBORFIELD

Carl Doran did not participate in discussions or vote on the application, having not been present at the previous Committee meeting where the item had been previously discussed.

This application was considered first during the meeting.

Proposal: Full planning application for Installation of a Solar park to include 40000 solar photovoltaic panels, 11 inverter/transformer cabins, a single control building and associated works to include vehicle access and fencing with Environmental Statement.

Applicant: Wessex Solar Energy

The Committee received and reviewed a report about this application as set out in agenda pages 5 to 74 of the Supplementary Agenda.

Harry Cannon, resident, spoke in objection the application. He commented that with regards to alternative sites, he heard that the Council was giving notice to tenant farmers to vacate land for the purposes of using it for solar. This suggested that Bartletts Farm was not the only site available. Harry Cannon stated that additional drawings and information provided did not show an elevation from the north, which would be 50ft tall and difficult to screen. He felt that this would have a negative visual impact.

Richard Wearmouth, Applicant, spoke in support of the application. He commented that their Landscape Architect and the Council's Landscape Officer had agreed that the application had no unacceptable impacts. Once existing screening by vegetation and topography was considered, views from the surrounding area, were limited. There would

be additional buffer zones, new hedgerows, trees, and planting. With regards to land quality, Natural England as a statutory consultee, had not raised any concerns. The landowner had reported low crop yields despite the application of lime and fertiliser. During the life of the solar farm the land would not be lost, and the quality of the land would be improved as more intensive agricultural practices were temporarily moved away from and regenerative farming practices were introduced. He reminded Members that the land would eventually return to its current use. Richard Wearmouth asked that the application be considered on its own merits. A Site Alternative Assessment had been provided in the application, which had set out the applicant's systematic approach to site identification. Richard Wearmouth added that solar parks needed to be able to connect to the Grid, to be accessible from the road network and for a landowner to be willing to accommodate it on their land. This site met these requirements. The site was free from National and Policy designations and Rights of Way, had an onsite Grid connection and had been made available by the landowner for use.

Stuart Munro, adjoining Ward Member spoke in objection to the application. He commented that the solar farm at Sheepbridge Court had been in place for six years and that the hedging provided, provided insufficient screening.

Gary Cowan questioned whether the site was the most appropriate location. He commented that it was one of the first times the Council had dealt with an application of that size and that it was a learning curve for Members and Officers. He noted that other Councils, such as Renfrewshire, had professional standards, and that the Council did not appear to have these. Mark Croucher responded that the Council did have a policy regarding renewal energy provision, CCA5, which the application accorded with. He went on to highlight a solar farm application which had been granted at Committee stage in 2014.

Gary Cowan expressed concern around the lack of drawings or photos of potential before and after, and site elevations and on-site vertical structures. Mark Croucher commented that Members had been on a site visit to visualise how it may look, and that the applicant had submitted further information to assist. A Landscape Visual Impact Assessment had been submitted by the applicant. Catherine Brimble, Landscape Officer, believed whilst there would be some limited harm, it would not be unacceptable.

Gary Cowan commented that BRE provided guidance on the development of large-scale ground mounted solar and PV systems. He asked whether this guidance had been followed. The preference was for land used to be either 3B, 4 or 5, which was not the case in this application. Mark Croucher indicated that Officers had looked at Planning Practice guidance in detail.

Gary Cowan queried the potential impact of glare from the solar panels. He expressed concern regarding the fact that the Aviation Authority had not been consulted given the proximity of Heathrow Airports, Blackbushe and Farnborough Airports. Mark Croucher indicated that the site was not within an aerodrome safeguarding zone and therefore there was no requirement to consult.

Gary Cowan commented that the Ministry of Housing, Communication and Local Government policies on light pollution and low carbon energy 2015 stated that Councils should develop a renewable and low carbon energy policy. However, this had not been the case.

In response to a question from Andrew Mickleburgh regarding alternative sites, Mark Croucher commented that the applicant had provided significant information as to how the site had been selected. There were several factors to be considered such as land quality, willingness of the landowner and access to the Grid. Twenty landowners had been contacted and only two had responded. Officers felt that the application accorded with the Development Plan and should be approved on its own merits.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried the height of the solar panels. He questioned whether the hedgerows would be able to ensure full screening from all distant locations, and if not, how many locations would be able to easily see the panels. Mark Croucher confirmed that the panels would be 2.43m high. With regards to visibility, Catherine Brimble stated that the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment submitted with the application was very thorough. From long distance and medium distance views, there would not be views of the site because of the topography surrounding the site and the vegetation cover. Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether all statutory consultees had responded and at what stage in the process had residents of Farley Hill been informed of the public consultation. Simon Weeks stated that 89 letters of objection had been received, which suggested that the application had been known about. Mark Croucher commented that the statutory consultees had all been consulted but he was unsure as to whether they had all responded. With regards to the public consultation there was only the obligation to consult the immediate properties. However, a second round of wider consultation had been carried out. Residents would have had approximately five months in which to submit a consultation response.

Andrew Mickleburgh asked about the restoration of the land to its existing condition after 40 years, and examples of this being done elsewhere to prove that it was possible. Mark Croucher stated that solar energy was relatively new so there were few examples of decommissioning.

In response to a question from Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey, Mark Croucher confirmed that having a view was not a right of ownership.

Stephen Conway commented that he and many other Members had voted in favour of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, but that he was unsure whether the proposed site was suitable and sustainable. He still had concerns regarding the harm to the landscape and felt that renewable energy sources should not damage the landscape.

Abdul Loyes asked whether 33KvA was the highest capacity and was informed that it was the minimum that could be tapped into.

Angus Ross commented that he still regretted the loss of agricultural land.

Gary Cowan proposed that the application be refused on the grounds of inadequate plans and drawings. This proposal was not supported.

RESOLVED: That application 200711 be approved subject to prior completion of a legal agreement pursuant to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to secure an Employment Skills Plan, and conditions and informatives as set in pages 3 to 8 of the Supplementary Agenda.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Laura Blumenthal
Lindsay Ferris
Pauline Helliard-Symons
Abdul Loyes
Barrie Patman

60. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Wayne Smith.

61. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

62. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

This is the last Executive Meeting of 2020. It has been without doubt a tumultuous year. I would like to start this meeting recalling all those who have sadly passed away this year including:

- The 189 residents who have died with Covid;
- The horrific Forbury murders of James Furlong and his friends; and
- James Box's sudden and unexpected death.

Please could you join me in just a moment's silence.

As we prepare for a Christmas that will, due to Covid, be like no other any of us can recall, I want to take a brief moment to look forward with some hope to 2021.

This has been a terrible year and I do not wish to downplay the suffering people have gone through. Whether you have lost a loved one, struggled with illness, stress or anxiety or have been financially hit by this pandemic. My thoughts are with you and the Council is here to help.

We also have a rising number of cases in the Borough and so must be vigilant and sensible. Keep to the Covid-19 rules and limit the number of people we meet. We were moved into Tier 3 today with the additional restrictions that brings.

As a result of significant data analysis, we have identified and will identify six Wards; the hot spots. Today they are Winnersh, Shinfield, Bulmershe and Whitegates, Loddon, Emmbrook and Sonning where the incidence of Coronavirus at the moment is the highest and will be concentrating our efforts and messaging there. Councillors and residents are asked to work with us to change behaviour. This list of hotspots will change from week to week.

It is vital, therefore, that we remember and keep to the Covid rules and, in particular at this time of year, remember that the more social interaction we have, the more we risk spreading infection.

However, there are reasons to be optimistic in Wokingham Borough thanks to our fantastic voluntary organisations, health and care workers and diligent Council Officers we are coping with Covid-19 collectively, compassionately and with much innovation.

Today we launched one of the first lateral flow testing services in the country, I believe it to be the first, that will help people visit residents in care homes at Christmas. The tests are being offered at Shute End to those with loved ones in those homes that have signed up to the scheme. In this way, we are adding peace of mind to people who want to visit the homes but who, understandably, want to minimise risk of taking infection with them.

We will be assisting schools to introduce lateral flow testing in the New Year. Our support for the NHS's local tracing service is proving effective, with 90% contact tracing success in the Borough. This is in part thanks to our introduction of text message tracing and door-knocking to follow-up on contacts.

We are also helping the NHS with its vaccination programme, with care workers in the Borough among the first to get the jab. As 2020 has been the year of Covid-19, it must be hoped that 2021 is the year of the vaccine. As I have mentioned, our cases are rising, and the vaccination programme will take time to roll out and so it is no panacea: but it is a cause for optimism and that is an important commodity right now.

I am delighted to announce that Wokingham Borough Council is launching an 18-month pilot scheme to help people with mental health issues in the Borough funded by a generous donation from a resident. The scheme will be run on the Council's behalf by mental health charity Oxfordshire MIND, giving our GPs very valuable help. Among the areas it will focus on are recognising mental health issues early and intervening to prevent conditions deteriorating, ensuring timely referrals to specialists, coordinating the support available for those with mental health issues and promoting awareness of the issues in the community.

The pilot service will be inclusive, ethically and able to meet the wellbeing and mental needs of a diverse range of residents of the Borough. It will develop a way to support those with mild to moderate mental health needs, for instance including non-medical interventions such as social prescribing, self-management, peer support, signposting, and activities. It is estimated that it will support about a thousand people each year.

Apart from Covid, we have other reasons for optimism in the Borough.

Despite the pandemic and resulting economic problems, our regenerated Wokingham town centre is attracting new businesses that are prepared to invest at this difficult time because we have been prepared to invest in the Town. The new homes in the town centre, built as part of the regeneration, are selling fast and the retail and business units are being snapped up. Earley, Woodley and Twyford are also vibrant. This, along with our other prudent investments are providing a sound financial base to underpin our services and improve our schools, leisure centres, roads and other community facilities.

As a sign of confidence in our Borough I am delighted to announce plans to develop the "largest purpose-built film studio" in the UK have been put forward in Wokingham. US company Blackhall Studios and the University of Reading want to build the new £150m studios at Thames Valley Science Park in Wokingham. Blackhall said the move would "bring major Hollywood film productions to the UK" and create up to 3,000 jobs.

Notwithstanding a very challenging year, our finances are strong and our Finance Team second to none. Whilst there is some incomprehensible and, may I say, uninformed concentration on our gross borrowings, our net borrowings are extremely low and interest rates are pegged for up to 50 years. We will be presenting a balanced budget which continues to be ambitious in our aim to:

- Enrich lives;
- Safe, strong communities;
- The right homes in the right places;
- A clean and green Borough;
- Keeping the Borough moving;
- Changing the way we work for you, to be the best that we can in serving our residents.

The issue of housing numbers has been overshadowed by Covid but it is vitally important to our future. You will recall that, during the summer, the Government proposed a new methodology for allocating housing that would have buried our Borough under an avalanche of concrete, with developers able to build at will. At the time, I felt that I was a lone voice. We campaigned hard against this and we have been successful. Our housing numbers at 759 (30 below the standard method of 789) are still too high but considerably more achievable than the 1,635 the white paper proposed. This is as a direct result of all those who lobbied for a different approach among whom we were a major voice and I would like to thank all the Councillors, our very hard dedicated MPs and residents, for their support.

Therefore, despite the ongoing pandemic, I believe we can look forward to 2021 with some cautious optimism. Covid-19 has not gone away and we must remain careful, in particular over Christmas, but the foundations are in place for the Borough to recover strongly from this awful year.

Please observe the rules rigorously especially during the Christmas period. Help us to slow down the increase and to reverse it.

May I thank all the Directors and Officers who have been throughout the year flexible, innovative and dedicated. Thank you for your considerable commitment to the wellbeing of our residents.

May I thank my Executive team for their hard work and all the Councillors for their support.

Lastly may I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

63. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted.

64. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

64.1 Barrie Patman asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

What is the sequencing for inoculation?

Answer

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has recommended that the aim of the first phase of the vaccination programme has got to be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from Covid-19 increases with age, the prioritisation is primarily based on age.

In answer to your question directly the priority list is:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those over 75 years old
4. All those 70 years old and older and extremely clinically vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. All individuals 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

It is estimated that taken together these groups will cover 99% of preventable mortality from Covid-19.

The next phase of the vaccination programme after this will seek to reduce further hospitalisation and provide targeted vaccination of those at high risk of exposure or those delivering public services. The planning of this second phase is ongoing with more detail expected in Spring 2021.

Supplementary Question

Do you think that us moving to Tier 3 is going to have any impact on the process of this at all?

Supplementary Answer

It is difficult to know because it only happened today. What I would hope to see, and we will be lobbying hard for, is further support from Central Government in terms of getting hold of as many vaccinations as possible and any support they can offer us increasing testing for the Borough so we can drive down case rates and get ourselves into a better position.

64.2 Pauline Helliar-Symons asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

How will we be asked when we are due for a vaccination?

Answer

The NHS is offering, and priority is being given with the Covid-19 vaccine, to the people who are most at risk from coronavirus.

The vaccine is being offered in some hospitals across England and, from this week, hundreds of local vaccination centres run by GPs. You are probably aware that it is being issued from the practice in Wargrave and it started this week in Finchampstead and other parts of the Borough will follow next week.

The order in which people will be offered the vaccine is based on advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

The NHS recommends that all eligible residents should wait to be contacted for a Covid vaccination. Do not turn up speculatively at your local surgery because it will not be there and obviously those who need it need to be prioritised. Residents will be contacted by their local GP practice when the vaccine is available.

Practices will select the communication channel which they normally use to contact patients. This may include, but is not limited to, phone calls, text messages, Emails or printed letters. Again, I would repeat, we need the vaccination teams to be focussed on doing their job and all residents are advised not to phone GP practices or other NHS services with general queries. The NHS will get to everybody as quickly and as efficiently as it can, in the order I set out in answer to the last question.

At present it is difficult for us to know how soon they will get through all of the first few lists but we will be keeping as much pressure on to get it done as soon as possible.

Supplementary Question

You might not know the answer to this Charles but do you happen to know whether those of us whose surgeries are in different boroughs will have all of that same applied?

Supplementary Answer

You are talking about if you have got a surgery for example in Bracknell Forest? I would imagine so but I do not know the answer is the truthful response. I would imagine that they will be following the same principles, which I read out earlier, because they are nationwide and Bracknell Forest is obviously in Berkshire East. I was present at the Health and Wellbeing Board last week when Berkshire West was discussed, which includes obviously West Berkshire and Reading, and the same principles have been put in place there so I see no reason to believe that Berkshire East would be any different.

64.3 Lindsay Ferris asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**Question**

There will be a considerable amount of work required by Wokingham Borough Council to ensure that there is a coordinated and speedy route to enable our local Health Services to administer the long awaited Covid-19 Vaccines to our residents in the Borough. This action is likely to require additional financial resource as well as the need for additional staff to provide these functions. The Liberal Democrat Group on WBC support such action. It is

also important that WBC continue to provide as many of our local services during this period as possible.

We recommend that WBC find someone with experience in logistics/programme management or project management to ensure these capabilities are provided in a cost effective and efficient manner. This work will be complex and it is essential that these actions are implemented in an expedite manner.

As time has been short, the information within the Executive paper will by definition be limited. Can the Leader of the Council provide additional information on this project at the Executive meeting and will he continue to provide updates on a regular basis, so that all parties can be made aware of what has been achieved and what still needs to be completed?

Answer

The Council has successfully managed its Covid-19 response since March by standing up and using its emergency planning governance to oversee planning and delivery. This is chaired by the Chief Executive and includes all the directors. The 'Gold' meeting, as it is called, meets as often as needed and was meeting daily at the height of the pandemic. As part of this function the Council draws on all of its resource and expertise as needed from around the Council, included in this is access to qualified and experienced programme management.

This meeting tonight is to finalise plans to release additional funding that will support several initiatives across the Council's Covid-19 response. This includes the delivery of rapid tests to enable care home visits before Christmas, building upon its local contact tracing service and supporting the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme across the Borough.

Subject to approval tonight, £500,000 has been requested to support these initiatives and ensure they can run effectively. Significant work is already being undertaken, with Council employees working tirelessly on the planning and preparation of a local pilot that will support care homes with their rapid testing of visitors.

This is an important step and will mean that care home residents in the Borough could have face-to-face contact with loved ones before Christmas. To help local care home providers navigate rapid testing for visitors the Council has made the decision to manage the process and conduct these tests at its Shute End Offices. There will be a range of measures in place to ensure that the site is as safe as it can be possible.

Throughout the pandemic, our aim has always been to support our communities as much as possible, particularly our most vulnerable residents in local care homes. There are a lot of administrative and technical logistics involved with rapid testing, which could put an additional pressure on care homes that are already under a lot of strain. This is why we have decided to create a central test point at our Shute End Offices.

We will be one of the first Boroughs in the UK, actually I think we are the first, to undertake a pilot of this kind and a tremendous amount of effort has gone into its organisation. To be able to facilitate a rapid testing programme and enable residents to visit care homes before, during, and after the festive period is extremely rewarding. That said, we will continue to take extra precautions and for safety visitors will need to keep their distance and still wear full PPE when visiting loved ones.

In terms of other programmes identified, the Council has already been running a successful contact tracing scheme to support NHS Test and Trace, with the contact tracing success rate currently sitting at 90% across the Borough. It is proposed that additional funding will support the continuation of this service and develop a further element of self-isolation for those who need it.

In addition to this, Wokingham Borough has been allocated a limited number of vaccinations for care home residents and staff. While the roll-out of the vaccination programme is being led by the NHS, it is supported by local authorities, and in particular us, and it is expected that the Council will need to provide additional support to its partners as the programme expands. This will require additional resource to manage and coordinate the programme locally.

We are continuing to dedicate a huge amount of resource to our Covid-19 response and we are proud of those efforts. However, we must remember that it will be some time before we can see the impact of certain initiatives, such as the vaccine programme, on our case rates. Therefore, it is extremely important that we adhere to the rules and follow social distancing guidance to prevent a rise in community transmission rates during the rollout of these programmes.

I will always, as you know, endeavour to be open and transparent in how we support our residents and will happily commit to giving you regular updates as I have in the past.

Supplementary Question

As you know if there is something that I am prepared to support the Council with I will stand up and say so. This is one of those issues and I think is absolutely vital and fully support the actions. Have any grants or anything come from Government to support this or is this funded from within?

Supplementary Answer

It is a very difficult question because what the Government has done is given grants and said this is your lot until March 2022. So, the current presumption is that we are not going to get any more money but I suspect that will change because the new requirement for lateral flow testing for schools, which is not really completely developed, is going to require a huge amount of resource, particularly from us, to do it properly. So at the moment the answer is no but I suspect the future answer will be yes.

64.4 Gary Cowan had asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question but as he was unable to attend the meeting the following written response was provided:

Question

As Coronavirus infection rates across Berkshire continue to fluctuate but some neighbourhoods have seen a huge increase in cases, according to government statistics. Across Berkshire, cases have continued to surge in many areas, like Wokingham and College Town. Within Wokingham Borough, numbers continue to rise as a fairly high percentage. Wokingham West and South saw the highest percentage increase, and the greatest number of new cases overall throughout the Borough. The area now has the highest rolling infection rate, which has grown significantly in the last month. Arborfield and Garrison also have a high infection rate.

Is it possible to regularly reproduce the data from Berkshire Live on the Council's website?

Answer

As has been identified within the question, the best, most accessible, source of information for residents to find out the latest Covid-19 cases data for Wokingham Borough is the Public Health for Berkshire Covid Dashboard.

This website contains the most up to date Covid-19 data. It also includes data from each of the local authorities across Berkshire. There is also a more detailed data presentation prepared each week which is found in the information centre on the website. As this data is updated in 'real-time' it has been agreed that the most appropriate way for Wokingham residents to access the most up to date data is by visiting the website directly or by accessing through the links on the Wokingham Borough Council Website. This prevents there from being multiple versions of data which are updated at different times which risks causing confusion.

The website can be easily accessed at the web address www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk or if you google "Berkshire Public Health" it is the first result that comes up. In addition the website is linked through the Wokingham Borough Council Website, from the home page/front page of the WBC website you need to click on the orange banner marked "find out the latest about coronavirus" this will lead you to a page of the latest Covid-19 updates from where you can click on the link "Covid 19 Dashboard" which will take you to the Berkshire Public Health website.

64.5 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

What is the best source of information for residents to find out the latest Covid-19 case data for Wokingham Borough?

Answer

Good information on something like this is very important and the best, most accessible and most accurate, source of information to find out the latest Covid data for Wokingham Borough, and indeed all of West Berkshire, is the Public Health for Berkshire Covid Dashboard. This website has live updates from Government data sources so contains the most up to date information. It clearly shows the number of new cases on any given day, the weekly rate for an area, as well as mortality data. It also includes data from all of the local authorities in Berkshire. There is more detailed information prepared every week, which is found in the information centre on the website. This includes detailed local information about each ward and what is going on there. The web address is www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk or just simply google "Berkshire Public Health" and it is the first result that comes up.

For those who want more data and more detail about the national picture the Government website www.coronavirus.data.gov.uk covers all the local authorities in the UK. If anybody wants to know what is going on I would firmly recommend going to that site. Do not accept what you see in the papers as gospel.

There is also the Zoe app, that is widely touted, and this has merits, but it tracks symptoms it does not track cases. So, if you want to know what is going on with cases that is the place to go.

64.6 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Can you set out for me how the Council's finances will be impacted by the welcome spending of up to £500,000 to support the Council's Covid-19 response?

Answer

Obviously, this is a significant sum, and it is a credit to how well the Council has run and continues to run its finances under the careful stewardship of Graham Ebers and his finance team that we are able to meet this level of spending to support the response to the pandemic. The latest Revenue Monitoring I will be presenting at the Executive in January will show we have managed to turnaround the projected overspend due to Covid-19, and whilst there is more to do, there is every prospect of a final outturn on or around budget, even with the impact of the pandemic. That said, whilst the Council will be able to set a prudent, sustainable, and balanced budget next year, there remains uncertainties around future Government settlements which still represents a challenge.

Further to this the recent Mid-Year Treasury Management Report, presented to the Audit Committee and following on to the Executive next month, has highlighted the benefits to the local taxpayer of sound investments, including our commercial and regeneration portfolio, whilst maintaining sustainable debt that delivers Council priorities and the setting of prudent reserve balances. Allied to this is the recent 'myth-busting' release around the Council's financial position.

It is this careful and innovative financial approach that means we can afford to do this whilst still remaining at safe balances, unlike a lot of the Councils in the country.

As I keep on saying to everyone a council which is broke is no use to anybody.

65. ADULTS SOCIAL CARE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The Executive considered a report requesting a supplementary estimate of up to £500,000 to support the Council's response to Covid-19.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services introduced the report and advised the meeting that the supplementary estimate would support a number of initiatives including:

- lateral flow testing for care home visitors which would support aged and vulnerable residents and enable them to have visits from their family including physical contact i.e. hold hands etc;
- the provision of additional contract tracing capacity and;
- support to assist the CCG deliver the Covid-19 vaccination programme which started last week in the Borough and which was expected to increase significantly early in the new year.

In response to a query about what the implications were for moving to Tier 3 Councillor Margetts acknowledged that there would be financial implications for people in the hospitality industry, who were having to close for the third time in less than a year, and also the difficulties faced by businesses. Councillor Margetts appealed to everyone to adhere to all Government guidance, including those relating to social distancing and the

wearing of masks, and also if anyone had any symptoms they should arrange a test and if asked to socially isolate do so in accordance with the rules.

With regard to a query in relation to when inoculations would be available across the Borough, Councillor Margetts advised that the CCG had split Wokingham Borough up into five PCN areas and inoculations would be offered in each of these areas by the end of December. Due to the specialised nature of the equipment that was required to administer the vaccine it was not be possible for all surgeries to undertake inoculations.

Members thanked the Director Adult Social Care, Matt Pope, and all the Officers involved in the Council's response to the pandemic for all their hard work which was much appreciated. In response Councillor Margetts stated that he was privileged to work with a very dedicated department who were solely focussed on doing everything they could to assist residents to get through this pandemic.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a supplementary estimate, in support of the Council's response to Covid-19, of up to £500,000 be agreed;
- 2) it be noted that work has already started in preparation and funding for this has been released by the Deputy Chief Executive (CFO) under emergency powers.

MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 DECEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 11.00 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Emma Hobbs (Vice-Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Paul Fishwick, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Abdul Loyes and Alison Swaddle

Councillors Present and Asking Questions

Councillors: Andy Croy and Rachel Burgess

Officers Present

Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director – Housing & Place Commissioning), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director Delivery & Infrastructure: Place and Growth), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources & Assets)), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways & Transport), Andrew Moulton (Assistant Director - Governance), Simon Price (Assistant Director, Housing, Income and Assessments), Nicky Thomas (Senior Specialist – Assessments), Chris Traill (Director - Place & Growth) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

Executive Members Present

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing, and Adult Services), UllaKarin Clarke (Executive Member for Children's Services), and Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport)

56. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

57. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Emma Hobbs relating to agenda item 62, on the grounds that she was a trustee on the Citizens Advice Bureau. Emma stated that she would still take part in discussions and any voting related to this item.

A declaration of interest was submitted from Graham Howe relating to agenda item 62, on the grounds that he was the Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services. Graham stated that he would take no part in any discussions or voting relating to this particular issue.

58. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

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59. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

59.1 Andy Croy asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:

Question

Claimants in receipt of child benefit have had the uncertainty surrounding the 'Child Benefit Tax' removed for a year while for this year at least, and two years after the issue was raised, the carers finally have the 'Carers Tax' removed.

Five out of the seven options considered were cuts to this benefit. There is nothing in the survey responses to suggest that, despite the wording of the survey, respondents wanted a cut to the benefit.

Why weren't options for a generalised improvement to the scheme even considered?

Answer

Firstly, we are unsure what the "tax" is referred to in the question. CTR is a benefit scheme that provides relief from council tax for those most financially vulnerable residents of the borough by giving a reduction in the amount of Council tax they pay.

I can only assume that you are referring to the fact that Child Benefit is not included in the income calculation when we assess CTR. This has always been the case since the Council have been running the CTR scheme and this continues with the new proposals.

When devising a scheme we have to consider both the impact on the residents eligible to receive CTR and all residents who pay council tax, along with the financial impact it will have on the Council and its delivery of services.

Therefore when considering a new or revised scheme alternatives were modelled in the context of affordability, the overall impact on the recipients benefiting from the scheme and the Council's budget.

Wokingham's scheme is comparable and on a par with most other Local Authorities CTR schemes and we are now proposing to make this scheme more generous by disregarding Carers Allowance in total for the first time.

Council Tax is a vital source of income for the council in responding to the current pandemic and council tax rates are holding up relatively well including payments by those in the CTR scheme. We will however keep this under close review and will ensure that we provide whatever support we can to those in genuine hardship in accordance with our commitments under the emerging Anti-Poverty Strategy.

59.2 Rachel Burgess asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:

Question

When the Council Tax Reduction scheme first replaced the Council Tax Benefit in 2013, expenditure on the scheme was £4.6m. This fell significantly in the ensuing years. These new proposals for 2021-22 are to spend £4.17m, which is just £6k more than the 'do nothing' position. Adjusted for inflation this represents a drop of at least 16% in the funding for this scheme since its introduction in 2013, with many fewer residents helped by the scheme.

As the report notes, we are still seeing the impact of Covid on low income residents – so why has the funding for this scheme fallen so significantly, when we know residents are struggling?

Answer

Initially in 2013 the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was funded by government and schemes were written to reflect this. The funding for this was withdrawn from 2015 and was then incorporated within the Revenue Support Grant, which was reduced to zero in 2018 for WBC.

There is therefore no set budget provision for the CTR Scheme; it effectively reduces the level of Council Tax we are able to collect and therefore the money available to provide vital services for the community. Our CTR scheme and its costs need to be designed in this context.

For 2021 we are however seeking to enhance the scheme by not taking Carers Allowance into account in the calculation of the CTR award and are proposing not to make any scheme reductions.

It should be noted that in addition to the CTR scheme the council is doing what it can to assist those in hardship which includes:

- £150 Hardship Payment for each CTR recipient paid against their council tax
- Test & Trace Support Payments for those on low income who have to self-isolate
- Winter Grant
- Council lead voluntary support for the vulnerable
- Local Welfare Provision
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Section 13a Discretionary Scheme.

Supplementary Question

I appreciate that you are enhancing the scheme, or proposing to do so, but that increase is only £6,000, which is tiny compared to the size of it. We know Council Tax is a regressive tax, and I think that it is as important as ever that a Council Tax reduction scheme does whatever it can to make sure that residents who are in financial hardship can receive the financial help that they need. So, in light of the reductions to the scheme made over several years, and the current extremely difficult circumstances in which people find themselves, as part of your role in this Committee in scrutinising this scheme, would the Committee consider tonight proposing an increase to the funding for this scheme. If you look at the detail as to how this is calculated, there are a number of different levers that you could pull to increase the funding for the scheme, is that something that you could consider this evening?

Supplementary Answer

It is a difficult one in that regard, as all we can do is make a recommendation. Now, what we can do is effectively ask for more data on this, as in terms of the scheme itself and the values that have dropped or the inflationary figures, I do not have those numbers in my head. It could be a case that the scheme numbers have reduced because the numbers of people that have claimed it have reduced. Now, has that reversed in the last twelve months because of Covid, I do not know. But, it is something that we need to ask questions about, and do the proper Overview and Scrutiny of, in order to drill into that detail and see if the amount being proposed for the budget in February is the appropriate and correct amount, as that is the role of Overview and Scrutiny.

At this point, further discussion was had about this topic.

60. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 18, which set out proposed changes to the Council Tax reduction scheme.

The report outlined the results of the public consultation which ran from 30th September to 11th November. In addition, the report gave details of the proposed change to the 2021/22 scheme, which would seek to disregard the total value of any carer's allowance as opposed to the previously disregarded value of £46.35 per week. Overall, this would equate to an approximate positive change for claimants of £6,059 per annum total between all eligible claimants.

John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Resources & Assets), Simon Price (Assistant Director Neighbourhoods and Communities) and Nicky Thomas (Senior Specialist – Assessments) attended the meeting to answer Member questions.

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

- How had Covid-19 (C-19) changed the responses received to the consultation compared to previous years? Officer response – Officers had noted an enhanced level of responses this year, partly due to the consultation being sent out to the wider charitable sector.
- Would more people be eligible under the scheme this coming year due to C-19 and potential lost jobs? Officer response – Officers were always nervous when major Government schemes, such as the furlough scheme, were due to come to an end. There had been a notable increase in Universal Credit applications, which could lead to increased demand on the Council Tax reduction scheme.
- A number of Members were reassured by comments made by John Kaiser, whereby he stated that this was a statutory scheme and if additional funding was required then it would be provided to meet the costs of the scheme. Graham Ebers added that there were a variety of variables and risks associated with Council tax, and this statutory scheme was just one part of a significant and complex strategy. Graham added that the best way to guard against unforeseen demand and costs was to ensure safe general fund balances.

- How many people were currently using the Council Tax reduction scheme? Officer response – Approximately 3896 people were using the scheme at present.
- Considering nearly 4000 people were using the scheme, some Members found it disappointing that only 109 of those persons responded to the consultation. What additional outreach was being considered to engage with more of these persons in future? Officer response – The consultation had been advertised and sent to all voluntary sector partners this time around. Officers would take away these comments and look to try and extend the reach of the consultation in future, perhaps by working with the Department for Work and Pensions to increase engagement with persons using the scheme.
- It was noted that many people may not have understood the first question within the consultation. Officers stated that they would take this comment on board.
- As some people may get embarrassed responding to such a survey, would officers seek to word the consultation very carefully next year? Officer response – This was definitely the plan, and a review of the consultation was already scheduled for next year.
- Did foster carers pay Council Tax? Officer response – This was Council Tax related rather than Council Tax reduction related, and it depended on whether they had a specific exemption to the general Council Tax policy.
- The Committee reiterated their desire for more service users to be engaged with the consultation from next year. Officers stated that they would take this on board and thoroughly review next year.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) John Kaiser, Graham Ebers, Simon Price and Nicky Thomas be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) Officers would look to increase engagement with service users during the 2021/22 consultation, possibly by working more closely with the Department for Work and Pensions;
- 3) Officers review the wording of consultation question 1 as part of the scheduled review of the consultation;
- 4) Officers review the wording and phrasing of the entire consultation as part of the scheduled review of the consultation, as so to make respondents as comfortable as possible.

61. MAY 2021 ELECTION COUNT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 16 to 22, which gave details of the preparations for the count related to the elections scheduled to be held in May 2021.

The report outlined a variety of proposed changes to the standard format of the elections count timetable, including conducting the Borough and Town and Parish Council counts during the day on Friday 7th May, and conducting the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) count during the day on Monday 10th May. The counts were expected to take place

at the usual venue of Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, however there were contingency plans in place should this venue not be available for any reason. The report detailed a number of potential issues and possible solutions relating to Covid-19 (C-19) and social distancing guidelines.

Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director – Governance, attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Given current circumstances, Members appreciated the work that had already gone into planning for the counts, and found suggestions to be sensible. Given the need for social distancing, was it possible to use a separate hall to split the count and enable more effective social distancing? Officer response – This was being looked at as an option, however at the moment this didn't appear to be feasible, however this was at an early stage of planning. There would be a lot of communications regarding this, and other elements of the counts, in 2021.
- What time would the Friday count be expected to start? Officer response – A start time had not yet been decided, however the count would need to begin as early as realistically possible. Once a start time had been agreed, this would be communicated.
- In the case of a dispute during the count, how would any disagreements be managed? Officer response – The count would be held in a C-19 secure and safe way, whilst still offering all of the transparency and objectivity that Members and the public expect from Wokingham counts. The only difference may be that the process takes a bit longer this time around.
- If, for example, the Friday count started at 8am, what time would counting finish with a view to re-start on the Saturday? Officer response – Whilst there was no definitive answer with regards to this currently, it was likely that counting would stop during the early evening on Friday 7th May.
- What would the likely cost implications be of running the elections and counts in a C-19 safe manner? Officer response – A definitive cost could not be given at the moment, however it was likely that there would be increased costs associated with the May 2021 elections and count, and this was built in to the planning assumptions. In the past, extra costs incurred by Local Authorities through no fault of their own were reimbursed by the Government.
- Would extra staff be employed at polling stations to ensure the public could vote safely? Officer response – Officers were planning to employ additional staff at specific polling stations in order to ensure the public could vote safely.
- How were smaller polling stations going to be managed? Officer response – A paper was being presented at January Council which would outline a number of suggested venues to replace smaller venues which may not be suitable for the May 2021 elections.
- A particular school had commented that they had been told that there would not be expected to close, was this the case? Officer response – Officers were aware of the particular school in questions, and a call was being organised in with the Head

Teacher. It was likely that additional support would be required at the school including additional staff, which could result in the school having to close.

- It was noted that there was an expectancy of higher postal votes, and the Cabinet Office had so far been very clear that they expected the elections scheduled in May 2021 to go ahead.
- Agenda page 20 referred to staggered counts for Borough Wards. Would this mean that observers would get access limited to when their particular Ward was being counted? Officer response – The main concerns were about providing a safe counting environment, and ensuring that the process was transparent. No final decisions had been made, and officers were awaiting advice from the Electoral Commission shortly. An update regarding progress and developments could come back to the Committee in a couple of months' time.
- It was noted that Members could get in touch directly with the elections team to voice any concerns regarding unsuitable venues, for example if they felt that the entrance and exit situation would be unsuitable. Any Ward Members who may be affected by potential venue changes would be contacted in advance.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Andrew Moulton be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers be thanked for their work thus far in planning for safe elections and counts to take place;
- 3) A further update on planning and preparation for the elections and counts return to the Committee in a couple of months' time.

62. MTFP 2021-24: SPECIAL ITEMS AND CAPITAL BIDS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 23 to 116 and supplementary agenda pages 3 to 66, which detailed the special item and Capital bids to be included within the proposed 2021-24 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Charles Margetts (Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing, and Adult Services), UllaKarin Clarke (Executive Member for Children's Services), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive – Director of Corporate Services), Chris Traill (Director of Place and Growth), Nigel Bailey (Interim Assistant Director – Housing & Place Commissioning), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director Delivery & Infrastructure: Place and Growth), and Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways & Transport) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

Charles Margetts stated that if nothing changed, Adult Services would see a year on year growth in costs of approximately 4%. As such, a demand management special item was crucial to provide a better service for service users and to reduce costs by being more proactive rather than reactive, for example getting involved in a case earlier to avoid immediate crisis care. Charles added that a further special item included funding to provide a mental health nurse to meet the statutory start term needs related to Covid-19

(C-19). Regarding capital bids, Charles stated that these included a bid for a new elderly person's dementia care home to be situated within the Borough.

During the ensuing discussions relating to Adult's Services, Members raised the following points and queries:

- Relating to bid ASC 8, relating to demand management, what year on year saving could be expected? Executive Member response – Approximate savings of £1m per year could be expected going forward. The special item was to fund staff on short term contracts in order to set up the new system. This would require a cultural shift and change on the front end of the service, as more planned care would be delivered going forward with a more manageable workload for staff.
- Relating to bid ASC 9, relating to the hiring of a mental health professional, what ages would the service users be approximately? Executive Member response – This post would work with people from a variety of different age groups, and the role would add additional capacity within the existing team to deal with severe mental health breakdowns, which had seen a spike due to C-19.
- Relating to bid ASC 10, relating to transitions from Children's Services to Adult's Services, was the £270k proposed funding enough? Executive Member response – This had not been as well resourced in the past as it could have been, and this was additional funding to improve this service. The level of funding could be adjusted if needed. In addition, this was part of a much larger programme to get all areas of Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC's) Adult Services into the top 10% of the country.
- The transition programme from Children's Services to Adult's Services happened at 14 years of age at WBC, how did this compare to other Local Authorities? Executive Member response – An answer would be provided at a later date.
- Relating to the capital bid regarding the Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre, why had this taken a considerable amount of time to come about? In addition, why had the original published figure stated £10m of investment, whereas the supplementary papers stated a cost of £1.8m? Executive Member and officer response – A detailed answer would be provided at a later date, however Loddon Court had been adequate for some time, however it now needed investment to be brought up to standard.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items and capital bids for the Children's Services Directorate.

UllaKarin Clarke stated that the proposals in front of Members were not just about saving money, but also about providing a better and more efficient service for the Borough's children and their families. UllaKarin added that agency workers had been reduced from 36% to 27% of staff, and this trend was hoped to continue going forwards.

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

- How many agency staff were currently employed by Children's Services? Executive Member response – There would always be a certain need for agency staff within the service, but a lower total number was always better and cheaper for the service.

Agency staff were very useful for covering sick and maternity leave, however the service could not continue to employ agency staff for vast swathes of posts and therefore WBC were looking to entice more permanent staff with a variety of different incentives. The numerical figure of agency staff currently employed would be provided after the meeting.

- It was noted that costs of sending children to out of Borough schools and centres was becoming more expensive as other Authorities know that we are dependent on their services. It was therefore necessary to invest in in-Borough facilities to provide for most of the needs of children within the Borough. It was noted that it was very unlikely for all children to have their needs completely met in-Borough.
- Relating to the capital bid for the multi-faceted placement hub, when would this project be completed? Executive Member response – This was a rolling programme, and this would be the first hub to be refurbished, and more could be refurbished in the future if there was a need. This was about improving the service provision, and as this was a statutory service then all costs would be met. The works for this project could and would not start until this funding was formally approved.
- Why was the compass team being funded through special items rather than a permanent budget line? Officer response – This was effectively about the funding for the team being proven as effective before being made a permanent line. The hope was that this could provide some good savings and better outcomes for children.
- Relating to bid CS20, parenting assessments, how much of an issue was this? Executive Member response – The issue was that currently the Early Help team had to be used for this function, which took them away from their work. If this team was not used then outside help would have to be commissioned which was expensive.
- Relating to bid CS29, Children’s Transformation Programme, was the £1m of funding enough to reach a ‘Good’ OFSTED rating, and when was the next scheduled OFSTED inspection? Executive Member response – The next inspection was possibly due in the spring, and the service had to make improvements to become ‘Good’ and then ‘Outstanding’. If the inspection came before implementation of schemes, then proposals would be presented to OFSTED which would be used when calculating WBC’s OFSTED rating. WBC was very committed to completing the journey to a ‘Good’ rating, and the reserves were there to support that journey if needed.
- Relating to bid CS24, Recruitment & Retention Strategy, had comparisons been made with other Local Authorities such as South Buckinghamshire or Oxford? Executive Member response – The service was making comparisons with similar sized Local Authorities such as Bracknell and West Berkshire. Some authorities offered allocated parking at office sites whereas WBC did not currently. WBC needed to become more inventive with the remuneration offer to professional Children’s Services staff, regardless if they were in a management role.
- It was noted that when WBC achieved ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ OFSTED ratings, this would in turn attract more high quality staff to join the WBC team in permanent positions.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items bids for the Place and Growth Directorate.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that special items included the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, the updated Local Transport Development Plan, and funding to cover loss of income at car parks due to C-19.

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

- Relating to bid P&G8, CRM, was £120k a suitable estimate? Executive Member response – This was an initial IT estimate prior to proper costing.
- Relating to bid P&G26, Local Transport Plan 4 and Delivery Plan, would this move alongside the Local Plan Update? Executive Member response – Yes, this would be developed alongside the Local Plan Update.
- Would Member have access to the proposed CRM system? Executive Member response – This was very desirable and the hope was that this could be achieved.
- Relating to bid P&G15, additional funding to support the local Plan Update, this was a very important project for WBC to stop speculative development within the Borough. Taking this into account, was the proposed funding enough? Executive Member response – A considerable amount of money had already been spent on the Local Plan Update, and this was additional funding to progress it further.
- Relating to bid P&G23, Building Control Fees Shortfall, how sure were WBC that the remaining partner Authority would not pull out? Executive Member response – WBC had made saving due to the service arrangement over the years, and the proposals asked for £100k to realign the service to meet the needs of the service. It was obviously a risk that the other partner within the service could drop out, and the service position would be re-evaluated going forwards.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the special items for the Communities, Insight, and Change Directorate.

Graham Ebers stated that the continuous improvement programme special item bid remained unchanged, and this would help deliver organisational change and improvements across WBC. Bid CIC12 would help to provide additional HR support for a year to deliver an enhanced people's strategy. CIC13 would provide much needed funding for the Community Safety Partnership and the Wellbeing Board, which had previously received no funding resource.

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

- Did the previous 21C programme create issues for services? Executive Member response – It is possible that some of the changes made during the 21C programme would not have been made in hindsight, for example the thinning out of staff within HR. It was important for WBC to have a strong HR department, and bid CIC12 reflected this commitment.
- It was noted that one of the key focusses of 21C was to protect specialist staff. The issue was that some of them became alienated. Key improvements were made, including more digital processes and streamlined procedures.

- It was noted that Committee Members supported funding towards the Community Safety Partnership and Wellbeing Board.

The Committee were updated on the sole Special Item for Resources and Assets. The Committee had no queries regarding this bid.

The Committee moved on to their overview of capital bids relating to the Climate Emergency agenda.

Pauline Jorgensen outlined a variety of highways projects including congestion management improvements. One key improvement would be that more utility work would be completed out of hours.

John Kaiser outlined a number of proposed projects including solar farms, the first of which would have a planning application submitted in 2021. Solar sites such as the one proposed could provide clean energy for the Borough for a period of 40 years, whilst generating revenue for WBC. John outlined the proposed energy reduction project, which would offer businesses support to lower their carbon footprint.

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

- Could energy reduction and clean energy generation projects result in helping people who suffer from fuel poverty pay their bills? Executive Member response – Whenever homes were built by WBC or one of our Council owned companies, it would be ensured that good quality materials and insulation was used. This would provide long term energy savings for residents.
- Regarding traffic management congestion, would any of this be funded from WBC reserves? Executive Member and officer response – My Journey received a contribution with each house that was built. S106 and some Local Enterprise Partnership monies also fed into funding this scheme. The first year of this scheme was fully funded, and further years would be funded by a variety of sources including grants.
- How would the shortfall in the capital funding be met? Executive Member response – Unless WBC knew that they would be receiving and grant for a project, then the project would not be included within the plan for the next year. Not all projects were undertaken in any given year, which meant that there would be residual money to roll over into future years and other projects. The capital programme was a large and complicated set of projects, which were undertaken on a rolling basis.
- What year 1 savings would be realised from the proposed solar farm? Executive Member response – The savings line would be achieved in the form of income generation from the first full year of operation.
- How many solar farm sites would be provided for the £1.2m to £1.4m bid? Executive Member response – The funding would provide for one large site to be commissioned and built.
- Relating to the bid to provide upgrade to existing WBC accommodation, what improvements were being made? Executive Member response – WBC only had this

type of accommodation at Grovelands, and the funding would provide temporary accommodation which was of good quality whilst being energy efficient.

At this point of the meeting Guy Grandison proposed that the end time of the meeting be extended for a maximum of 30 minutes, to 11pm. This was seconded by Paul Fishwick and carried.

The Committee moved on to their overview of capital bids relating to the Environment and Leisure portfolio.

Parry Bath gave an overview of a variety of projects within this portfolio, including the Carnival Pool redevelopment. Parry stated that the Carnival pool redevelopment was progressing well, and the outcome would be an asset to the Borough and its residents.

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

- What were the timescales for the completion of the Carnival Pool redevelopment, and were there any expected delays? Executive Member response – The project was scheduled to be completed in 2021, and there were no delays to the timescales.
- What date would the proposed in-Borough crematorium be built? Executive Member and officer response – The project was due to be completed in 2022/23.
- Relating to the housing and regeneration bids, the bid sheets contained a lack of detail. As this was a public document, what would be done in future to improve upon issues such as this one? Executive Member and officer response – This bid was about providing 1000 homes in 4 years at a return of 5% for WBC. The policy needed more of a strategic direction in order for the document to be clearer.
- How would it be ensured that the proposed crematorium would be as environmentally friendly as possible? Executive Member response – Officer and Member would make sure that all aspects of the proposed crematorium were as green as possible, reducing the carbon footprint wherever possible. Measures would include an arboretum and lots of tree planting.
- How many homes would be knocked down in phase two of the regeneration project, and how many homes would replace them? Officer response – A total of 249 new homes would be built, which was more than the amount being demolished. Of the 249 homes, 179 would be affordable.
- What was the correct costing for the proposed crematorium? Executive Member response – The project would cost £4m altogether including construction costs.
- It was noted that the Service was very proud of all workers who had maintained services such as weekly waste collection during the pandemic.

The Committee moved on to their overview of the capital bids relating to the Roads and Transport portfolio.

Pauline Jorgensen outline a number of proposals including improvements to the California Crossroads, and Highways Carriageways Structural Maintenance programme.

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

- Had a consultation been carried out regarding proposals relating to California Crossroads? Executive Member and officer response – A consultation had been carried out and responses had been taken into account. The requested funding was to enable works to be carried out. This was a multi-year project, and some detailed design work and the consultation costed money. Any roll-over of funding would go towards construction.
- How would any funding gaps be addressed? Executive Member response – There was always a chance that projects would move between years, which left funding available for other projects.
- With regards to the drainage blocks at California Crossroads, how would this be dealt with in the absence of additional funding? Executive Member and officer response – As part of the detailed design work, it was identified that where the drainage drained to had collapsed. There would be the ability to bid for additional funding to cover costs, which would go through the Executive as a supplementary estimate.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth , John Kaiser, Charles Margetts, UllaKarin Clarke, Pauline Jorgensen, Graham Ebers, Chris Traill, Nigel Bailey, Mark Cupit, and Andy Glencross be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) An answer be provided relating to how WBC's transition age of 14 between Children's and Adult's Service compared with other Authorities;
- 3) An answer be provided relating to the proposed Wokingham Learning Disability Outreach and Overnight Respite Centre, and why the original published figure stated £10m of investment, whereas the supplementary papers stated a cost of £1.8m;
- 4) The numerical figure of agency staff currently employed within Children's Services be provided;
- 5) All Members and officers be thanked for their contributions throughout the budget scrutiny process during this municipal year.

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