



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

27 JANUARY 2021 to 25 FEBRUARY 2020

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 10 March 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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Agenda Item 1

Decision made in the presence of:
James McCabe, Senior Planning Officer (Growth & Delivery Specialist)
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION RECORD SHEET IMD 2021/04
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Title of the report	West Berkshire – Local Plan Review Emerging Draft consultation
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith
ACTION BY Director, Place and Growth - Chris Traill
DECISION MADE ON 27 January 2021

Recommendation contained in the report

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submits the comments contained in this report as this council's response to the West Berkshire District Council consultation 'Local Plan Review – Emerging Draft consultation' (December 2020):

- 1) Support for West Berkshire Council's intent to meet housing needs in full within West Berkshire District;
- 2) Reiterates that any potential unmet housing need from Reading Borough Council should be clarified and addressed within West Berkshire District and/or Bracknell Forest;
- 3) Requests additional clarity on the approach to proposed allocations which fall within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone around AWE Burghfield;
- 4) Requests additional clarity over how Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson needs are to be met in full over the plan period;
- 5) Requests additional clarity on how or whether employment needs are to be met in full accounting for the longer plan period compared to the economic evidence base, as well as additional clarity on how and where office floorspace need will specifically be addressed;
- 6) Requests ongoing engagement as part of the Duty to Cooperate regarding infrastructure necessary to support the proposed growth.

Decision

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agreed that Wokingham Borough Council submits the comments contained in the IEMD report as this Council's response to the West Berkshire District Council consultation 'Local Plan Review – Emerging Draft consultation' (December 2020):

- 1) Support for West Berkshire Council's intent to meet housing needs in full within West Berkshire District;
- 2) Reiterates that any potential unmet housing need from Reading Borough Council should be clarified and addressed within West Berkshire District and/or Bracknell Forest;
- 3) Requests additional clarity on the approach to proposed allocations which fall within the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone around AWE Burghfield;
- 4) Requests additional clarity over how Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson needs are to be met in full over the plan period;

- 5) Requests additional clarity on how or whether employment needs are to be met in full accounting for the longer plan period compared to the economic evidence base, as well as additional clarity on how and where office floorspace need will specifically be addressed;
- 6) Requests ongoing engagement as part of the Duty to Cooperate regarding infrastructure necessary to support the proposed growth.

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

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

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

N/A

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

None

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

None

Background papers

N/A

PUBLISHED ON: 27 January 2021

EFFECTIVE ON: 4 February 2021

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 3 February 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.55 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Bishop-Firth
Prue Bray
Lindsay Ferris
Michael Firmager
Paul Fishwick
Sarah Kerr
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Caroline Smith

66. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

67. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 26 November 2020 and the Extraordinary Executive Meetings held on 2 December and 17 December 2020 were confirmed as correct records and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

68. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor UllaKarin Clark declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 77 – Delivering the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project – Confirmation of Compulsory Purchase Order due to the fact that she was a non-Executive Director and Chairman of Loddon Homes Ltd. Councillor Clark remained in the meeting during discussion of the item but stated that she did not intend to vote on the matter.

69. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement.

We had a milestone this week where deaths within the UK for those who have been diagnosed with Covid within 28 days have risen to above 100,000. Please join me in a minute's silence for those who have died during this dreadful pandemic in the UK, Wokingham and the hundreds of thousands of people who have died around the world.

The weekly rate to 22nd January in Wokingham is 266.5 today, which is well below the peak of 606 on the 4th January, but still compares very badly to below 5 in August. Sadly, deaths and hospitalisations will continue to rise for some time.

We can only reduce this significantly if all our residents take full advantage of the lockdown to minimise social contact. Minimisation means only absolutely necessary social contact. If we do, coupled with the roll out of the vaccine, we can look forward to returning to normal around about Easter.

I would like to thank again all those, who have played a part in helping those who have suffered not just the effect of the virus itself but all the problems which have accompanied it. This includes all carers, doctors, health staff, social care staff, health, police, fire, rescue, ambulance, teachers, school staff, charities and volunteers. In short everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue during these appalling times. So, to all of you, a very big thank you.

The 'golden thread' within this Borough is the Council; this Administration has sought to knit all its institutions together including health, the voluntary sector, and the blue light services, which have served us well in this emergency. Our GPs have told us that a provision for mental health is much needed. We have appointed Oxfordshire Mind; the pilot for the next eighteen months has generously been funded by Tatiana and Andrey Borodin of Park Place, to whom I am extremely grateful.

Coronavirus has now been with us for a long time. However, there is light at the end of the tunnel, with the vaccine, developed here in the UK in record time. Thanks to our brilliant scientists.

We in WBC are navigating with a steady hand through the emergency, changing the way we work, supporting all our residents, and ensuring that services run as normally as possible. Whilst this has been expensive financially, it has been possible in the short term.

Much of that which has been done during the height of the crisis, we shall need to do for some time together with all the new requirements. The biggest and most important of which is the roll out of the vaccination across the Borough at the same time ensuring continuity in all our services.

I can only express my huge admiration for the doctors and staff in Wokingham Borough. They have been at the forefront of vaccination delivery in the country. Your doctors are vaccinating almost as soon as they receive deliveries.

This Executive tonight is to approve an additional £1.2 m to be made available during this financial year. This investment is only possible because of the well run and excellent control this Conservative Administration has exerted over the Council finances for many years.

These funds will be made available not only to help the roll out of the vaccination programme but to support a boost to our anti fly tipping initiative, assisting pre-schools, keeping the homeless and rough sleepers off the streets, and supporting charities with whom, along with the pre-schools, are very much part of the vital support structure of our community.

Tonight, you will hear my Executive talk about how this money will be channelled to the areas needed in the community, how it is designed to help get the Borough back on its feet, repair the damage done during the past ten months and ensure those things which have been on hold during the pandemic can start to fully function again as quickly as possible.

This Conservative controlled Council will not be found wanting to support residents be it child hunger, poverty, homelessness or any other need.

70. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

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

“The presence of overhead electricity cables and pylons has led to some visual intrusion in the open landscape, which is not considered to be local in character, and therefore does not warrant further consideration as a Local Green Space designation.”

Does the Member agree that, as the photographs I have provided to you show, any visual intrusion is insignificant, and is not a sufficient reason to refuse the designation of Local Green Space?

Personally, walking in this pleasant area, I never notice the cables. What I notice is trees, bushes, flowers, grasses, the river, water fowl, other birds, insects, fungi, lichen, people on the water and the land, dogs, boats, fresh air and the weather. It is both restful and interesting.

Will the Council ask the Officers to strike out this statement on the basis of its lack of accuracy?

Answer

As mentioned previously, the consultation on the Draft Plan undertaken earlier this year provided an opportunity for everyone to express their views, including identifying things that could be improved.

The Draft Plan considered only a handful of areas that were put forward at the time. As a further step in this process, we invited the Town and Parish Councils, together with other community groups and organisations, last year to identify other areas of green spaces that they considered important to their community. As a result of that we received suggestions for a further 100 additional Local Green Spaces.

Different views have been put forward to extend the area that might merit designation as well as differing reasons. In addition to the original promotion, you refer to as the *‘Land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road’*, a wider area has now been promoted and encompasses the larger area of open green space at the Thames Valley Park. The promotion includes further supporting information to explain its suitability for designation.

As you are aware, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of an individual proposal at this time. However, I can assure you that the view of all respondents, even where the information is provided in a different format (i.e. photographs as you mentioned earlier), will be considered as a way forward and how we make our

assessment. Where necessary and justified, our proposals will be amended and recommendations on the merits of areas across the Borough will be reported back to Executive as part of a future report on the Local Plan.

As an assessment of each promoted area of green space this will be documented in a future update to the Topic Paper. The document will be available to view and comment on as part of the future consultation on the Local Plan later this year. I would estimate that should be around the Summer.

Supplementary Question

I understand that but in order, in the meanwhile, to remove doubt would Councillor Smith ask the Planning Officers to issue a revision of the Topic Paper on Local Green Space that corrects the errors highlighted by SOAR to avoid the possibility that it remains on file with the potential to mislead future consideration of this area by Councillors?

Supplementary Answer

What you need to consider, and do not take this as me being blunt, but whoever put forward the first proposal they put forward a very small area and the way I can describe it, it was almost the landing base to the MRT. What has now been put forward is a much stronger assessment that carries much more weight and as I said it would be inappropriate for me to tell you whether that is going to go forward or not. But what I would say is it is a much stronger paper than what you put forward originally because I think what you were trying to do on your original piece was to try to almost avoid the MRT happening but not encompassing the whole riverbank, which would have been a far better way of doing things.

70.2 Morag Malvern asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

How is the Borough Council planning to fully inform all EU residents here, in a timely way, of their rights to vote, and to stand as candidates, in local elections?

Answer

The Borough Council continues to monitor any changes to the voting franchise and makes the latest information available on its website for both voters and potential candidates.

The current position is as follows:

Until domestic law is changed, EU citizens will retain their voting rights in local elections in England. This was confirmed by the Government in advance of the May 2020 elections that had been due to take place; the rights of EU citizens to vote and stand in local elections will not immediately change on exit from the EU.

This remains the case with local elections delayed from May 2020 to May 2021, as noted in a written statement from the Government: "The May local elections were postponed until 2021 due to Covid-19. In that context, the UK Government can confirm that resident EU citizens will remain able to vote and stand in the rescheduled May 2021 local elections in England (including the London Assembly elections) and the May 2021 Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales. Those elected to office will be able to serve their full term and this will also apply to those elected before 2021."

The UK Government had wanted to make reciprocal voting rights part of the negotiations for the UK's exit from the EU. However, they did not form part of the negotiations and instead the UK Government is negotiating reciprocal voting rights with individual EU countries.

Supplementary Question

I am just keen to establish that the way you suggested will actually reach all the EU residents here, not all of whom have the sort of IT capability; and I am not expert in that by any means. I do just worry that people might fall through the net. So, can you reassure me that you will make every effort to reach all EU citizens, even if they are not already on the electoral roll as some of them might not be. In the right language if need be. Also how do we get around the problem of not everybody having access to a website. Perhaps it is because they do not have top notch broadband; there is always that.

Supplementary Answer

We do our very best to ensure that all residents in the Borough whatever their provenance, who are entitled to vote, are on the electoral roll and we will continue to do so.

70.3 Philip Meadowcroft has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

Did the breaches of the Borough Constitution I identified at the January 11 Standards Meeting result from unintended or mistaken conduct or were they indicative of a wider disregard of the stipulations of the Borough's Constitution?

Answer

As you are aware, I provided a statement last week to full Council in which I set out the Council's position and apologised for what was an honest mistake.

Once again, I would like to thank you for raising this important issue.

At the Standards Committee meeting, you enquired whether the composition of its members was in conformance with 9.1.1 of the Constitution. You were correct; there was an inconsistency between the decisions made by full Council and this clause. The composition of the Committee was lawful, the Committee was lawfully established and its decisions and any decisions of a sub-committee of the Committee are lawful. It was lawful for the Council to change it in the way that it did.

However genuinely, it was a surprise as the Committee had been so constituted for twenty-one months spanning two Annual Council meetings. Neither had any member of the Committee, nor Officers, nor Members, nor the press raised this issue previously; if there is a fault it is jointly and several of all. Had I been aware of this clause I would not have proposed our appointments.

Indeed, immediately on being aware I corrected the membership to the rule. I apologise to Members and Officers for the inconsistency and again thank you for raising it. The Chief Executive has assured Members that, although an inconsistency existed, the appointments were made by full Council and therefore were constitutional. The Chief Executive has also pointed out that the composition and operation of the Standards Board are not statutory but local preference.

Supplementary Question

You have been breaching three requirements of the Constitution at 9.1.1a since May 2019 when you became Leader of the Council. You have repeatedly made the excuse that this was an honest and genuine mistake which nobody recognised until I raised it. Your honest and genuine plea is destroyed by the fact that you chose to pack the Standards Committee with three very senior Members of the Executive; yourself, the Deputy Leader and the Executive Member for Planning. Quite a formidable trio, I think.

This can only be regarded as your determination to bulldoze your authority and control on the Standards Committee to ensure your decisions would always be in favour of the ruling group of the majority party. Such hubris and arrogance prompts this supplementary question. Do you agree with me please that your conduct on this issue requires you to consider your position as Leader of the Council because what you have done has fatally undermined the respect and authority of your leadership and the overdue need of our Council to be seen to be conducted in a lawful manner at all times?

Supplementary Answer

No, I do not Philip for the reasons I have given.

70.4 Dani Esposito asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

The Topic Paper Local Green Space, accompanying the Draft Local Plan Update, the site, "*Land between Thames Valley Business Park and Napier Road*" it states, "*the site is not considered to be of particular local significance.*" Successive attempts to build roads over this land adjacent to the River Thames have been frustrated by residents, who, like myself (having taken up wild swimming) recognise the value of this space.

In the 1980s, "*Boot the Route*" and in response to the MRT proposals, SOAR was formed. Thousands of people signed petitions objecting to the construction of the MRT. A public meeting was attended by hundreds of people, who voted against the road in an exit poll by a majority of 90%. Earley Town Council, The Whitegates Residents Association, ACER and the Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust submitted objections. It was commented on that the number of objections received to these plans was unprecedented. At the public consultations held, the overwhelming majority of comments were against the MRT.

The description in the Topic Paper as, "*the site is not considered to be of particular local significance*" is incorrect. Will they ask the Officers to substitute a statement that reflects the local significance of this site?

Answer

As previously mentioned, the Draft Local Plan consultation undertaken early last year provided an opportunity for everyone to express their views on what we got right, what we did not get right and things that we could improve on.

Through the consultation various views were expressed regarding the assessment of the areas promoted for consideration as Local Green Spaces. We have received a significant number of additional promotions as I mentioned earlier to Helen of over 100.

With regard to the Kennet Mouth area some responses provided additional information and some now have promoted a much wider area which incorporates the river frontage and the area north of Thames Valley Park. These will be considered as we move forward in updating our assessments and producing the next version of the local plan for consultation later this year.

As previously mentioned it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of any additional proposal outside of the formal process but I can assure you, as I did Helen in my explanation earlier, that all respondents will be considered and all the information will be taken into consideration when we form our views.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for explaining again about the proposal of the larger area from Sonning to Kennet Mouth which creates a stronger case. Would you personally support protection within the planning framework for the area proposed by Earley Environmental Group, that covers the existing and much valued green space from Sonning to Kennet Mouth? This joining with the riverside within the Reading boundaries creates a 3-mile green corridor, stretching from Sonning to Reading that is so important for people and wildlife alike. If the Councillor feels that it would be inappropriate to reveal his position on the subject at the moment can he say when he will be able to do so?

Supplementary Answer

I do not know if you have reviewed my credentials on the MRT, Dani? I think if you would go back and look at the Planning Committee meetings, I led the march on not allowing the MRT. So, I think that says a huge amount about my personal view, but I obviously cannot say one way or the other, but I think I have given you a good lead into where I stand.

71. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

Why was the need for a consultation for the Traffic Regulation Order for Woodward Close right turn prohibition ignored for several years and only done less than two weeks before it was due to be implemented?

Answer

The Council did consult on alternative routes for the North Wokingham Distributor Road in September and October 2013 and received 1,500 responses. This was one of the Council's largest ever consultation responses and there was a clear public preference for the alignment currently under construction, which includes a permanent No Right Turn arrangement to and from Woodward Close. Following further technical studies, the recommended route was agreed at Executive in September 2015.

A request to advertise the Permanent TRO was made to the Council in October 2020 and given the passage of time since the scheme was last consulted upon Officers decided that, as part of the statutory consultation, it was appropriate to advertise the Order and inform residents likely to be affected by the banned turns again. The statutory consultation ran

until 14th January 2021 and subject to approval will enable the restriction to be put in place prior to the scheme opening in July 2021.

In December 2020, which I think caused part of the problem, a Temporary TRO was separately granted by the Council to ensure the safety of road users and construction workers whilst the temporary diversion of traffic was put in place, in order to enable connecting construction work for the NWDR and the A329 Reading Road. I think many people got the Temporary TRO understandably, I am not criticising them, confused with the Permanent TRO and thought basically that the Temporary TRO was going to be the permanent one.

It was very confusing and it was regrettable that we put both out at the same time. It was different arms of the organisation and I think it probably did not help the confusion.

Supplementary Question

This left turn is only required because of the new roundabout on Woodward Close and I have been waiting for the traffic modelling on this now for three months and still have not got it. It is all due to the Tory Local Plan Update which is adding 350 houses; quadrupling the number of cars coming through the roundabout now. So, I can I please have the traffic modelling?

Supplementary Answer

I am afraid I am going to duck that one as that is a question for Planning who approved the access that you are talking about not for Highways.

71.2 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Even before the Coronavirus pandemic, the hidden costs of sending children to school was a significant source of strain for many Wokingham families. Parents on lower incomes struggle to give their children the expensive blazers, jumpers with logos, sports kit with logo, and dress shoes which schools require. While one local supermarket could provide a full generic school uniform for £4.50 last September, parents at some of our schools are paying multiple times that amount for just one item of uniform because it has a colour and logo which is unique to that school. Parents may be lucky enough to pick up some second hand items in the right size, but that is less likely for shoes or reliable IT equipment, let alone school trips.

The pandemic is causing financial hardship to an increasing number of families and the effects may last for years. What action will the Council be taking to encourage maintained and other local schools to ensure that uniforms and other school costs are kept genuinely affordable for parents?

Answer

It is the governing body of a school that sets the uniform policy and where to source the uniform. The cost and the value should always be considered, and the Council is always reminding the schools about this. The uniform should also be easily available to buy, preferably from a local supermarket, so nobody has to travel anywhere.

Any savings negotiated by the school should be passed on to the parents. We ask the schools regularly to remind the parents that if they do have a problem, they will get help from the schools.

On our website you may have seen the Parents' Guides for starting Primary, Junior and Secondary Schools where we actually say that we do not have any assisted purchase scheme so they will have to turn to the school. I know many, many schools have a selection of used uniforms so there is the possibility of going down that way for them.

Supplementary Question

I agree that the governing body is responsible for setting the uniform policy and I am really pleased to see that you are in favour of those governing bodies setting a uniform policy which means that people can buy uniform from supermarkets. Unfortunately, I do know from talking to local parents that many of them are still struggling because there are still a lot of very unique branded items which are very expensive. The Childrens' Society is calling for councils and for schools to look at needlessly high uniform costs and other councils around the UK are actually supporting and influencing schools to look at what they can do to tackle this.

So, to give one very quick example allowing children to wear items in standard colours which can be bought from a supermarket with sew on school logos.

Will Wokingham commit to look urgently at what we can do to ensure that uniforms and other school costs for the state schools in our area are as affordable as possible and to use the Covid Winter Grant Scheme where this is needed to ensure that all children have the essential tools and supplies for learning in these difficult times?

Supplementary Answer

The Covid Winter Grant Scheme is meant to be used for food and for fuel. It cannot be used for buying clothes or shoes. But as I said it is the governing body of each school that makes these decisions so I would suggest that parents get together and they speak to the governing body. Nobody should have to suffer because they have to buy a school uniform.

71.3 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development the following question:

Question

Has Wokingham Borough Council done all it could to support businesses during the pandemic effect of Covid-19 and the lockdowns?

Answer

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the devastating impact that this pandemic has had on our national economy including very many of our local businesses who have my heartfelt sympathy at this extremely challenging time.

In these unprecedented circumstances I believe that the Council has really gone the extra mile to try and support businesses as much as possible in a myriad of different ways.

In terms of direct financial support the Council has to date disbursed around £42.5million of grants and are currently administering eight separate grant streams. In the fortnight up

to 22nd January alone we have paid out a further 365 grants totalling £2.5m with a further 380 applications in the process of being assessed.

I recognise the number of grants can be confusing and so have asked that the website and application process is made as simple as possible for businesses. That means that if a business is not eligible for a mandatory grant it will automatically be considered for a discretionary grant and, if it is still not eligible, details will be passed through to our Economic Development Team to contact the business direct to understand their situation and what other support could be offered; perhaps through the Berkshire Business Growth Hub or similar.

I have also been keen to ensure that we publicise the grants as much as possible and are also pro-active in contacting businesses who may be eligible and encouraging them to apply. However, there are no doubt some businesses who may not be aware or for whom the current grants are not suitable, and I would urge them to check the Grants page on our website or get in touch with our Economic Development Team or the Growth Hub to discuss that situation.

An extensive survey of businesses was also carried out to better understand need and the issues faced, especially with regard to our small businesses which are the mainstay of our local economy. Issues raised were followed up with 1:1 conversations and additional advice and support wherever possible. This has included close links with and signposting businesses to the Growth Hub for specialist advice and access to a range of other national financial help packages. A follow up survey will hopefully go out in the next couple of weeks to ensure that we have an accurate and up to date picture.

With changing restrictions across different tiers and timescales the Council has also sought to assist businesses to deal with the complexity of regulations so that they can trade safely and give confidence to their clients and customers.

The work of the PPP, the Public Protection Partnership, has been supplemented by our deployment of Covid support marshals to assist not only with the compliance but also to signpost to further advice and provide a reassuring presence to encourage customers back into our main town centres when it was appropriate to do so. Indeed, ensuring our town centres could re-open safely has been a major focus of our efforts to support as conducive a business environment as possible whilst ensuring that this could be done safely.

With the Christmas period being particularly important to many small traders I am also really pleased that we created the virtual Christmas market which ran for 38 days. This was a huge success and provided a platform for traders to continue to trade and their customers to access some 'Christmas cheer' in tough times. Feedback from both the 'stallholders' and customers has been overwhelmingly positive, so much so that we are looking at options of running a similar event over the Easter period and also for building on our 'Shop Local' message used throughout the pandemic.

Of course, the current national lockdown has further challenged our business community and as well as continuing to distribute grants as widely and as quickly as we can we need to keep working on identifying and targeting where support, monetary or otherwise, is most needed. We have built a strong partnership with business representatives from Wokingham, Woodley and Twyford etc who have been very effective in spreading communications and providing important feedback. In addition, the newly refocused

Wokingham Business Taskforce has brought together representatives from across the business community to help shape and monitor our response and recovery plans and actions.

With infection rates in Wokingham starting to fall and vaccination numbers increasing we can hopefully see a light at the end of the tunnel and can begin to look forward to recovery. However, our hard working businesses still need and deserve all the help we can give them and I can assure you we will continue to do what we can to support them.

Supplementary Question

Can you just confirm to me that Wokingham Borough Council is continuing to give support to businesses?

Supplementary Answer

We are putting more staff in and hopefully we will get a much closer relationship with these businesses and also we have a task and recovery group which is chaired by local businesses so we are doing, I think, a pretty good job with what we have got.

71.4 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

I am a member of the Earley Town Council Planning Committee and we are quite often receiving complaints from residents that they have not been informed by Wokingham Borough Council Development Control about any planning application near to their property. This matter has been ongoing for some time and the Chair of Earley Town Planning Committee has written in the past on this matter, but this is still happening.

Please can the Executive Member look into this matter and resolve it for all our residents so they are informed and therefore able to raise their concerns on a planning application affecting them?

Answer

I will just give you a preamble and then I will explain where we are given the information I have got within the last few hours.

Government regulations set out the Council's requirement for public consultation when a planning application is received and states that the Council must either: place a site notice on either the application site or write to adjoining owners or occupiers.

The Council consults in line with the regulations and its own Statement of Community Involvement which is available on the Council's website. Residents are provided with 21 days for comments. We are working on a new "Information for Neighbours Guide" because there have been a lot of changes, especially around Certificate of Lawfulness, prior approval and PE rights and we are currently working on that. Once that is available it will be going out to all towns and parishes and Members and it will be updated on our website.

In addition, while site notices are only required by law for major applications for development and a number of small applications, the Council sends out to the applicant a site notice and requests that this is displayed, but that is voluntarily and we cannot insist on this. Notification is also sent to Ward Members and the relevant town or parish council,

as you know, and all relevant documentation is displayed on the Council's website. The Council also publishes an updated list of applications which are validated every week and this is on our website.

Even where a resident has not been directly consulted by the Council about an application, they are able to respond and update their comments on our website to determine the application.

We sent out last year over 10,000 neighbour notifications and in my conversation with Officers today they have spoken to Royal Mail and we are going to do some spot checks. I have asked them to start in Earley just to check whether there seems to be an issue with these going out and if we can track them so that we can look at where we think these may be going wrong. A lot of times when we get people saying that they have not had it; it is because they live too far away from the application site. But rest assured we are looking into and this and if necessary we will produce some necessary videos etc so that people can understand what is available.

71.5 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

Looking at Item 70 - the Treasury Management Report 2020-21, there are some marked differences between this report and what has been approved and recommended to Executive by the Audit Committee. This appears to be in Appendix A. There appears to have been an extra £1.06 million added from Commercial Properties and £0 from the Town Centre Regeneration. These items do not appear in previous reports and were not part of the review by Audit.

As the Audit Committee constitutionally has the responsibility for monitoring Treasury Management decisions to ensure compliance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy, when is this updated report being brought before the Audit Committee for review and approval?

Answer

The report reviewed by the Audit Committee is at Appendix A and has been passed on to the Executive as required in the Constitution to the covering report. Audit Committee is required to review progress against the treasury management indicators, which they did, and note further information in the report.

The Executive is required to:

*"note Appendix A, **the Treasury Management Mid-Year report** which was agreed at Audit Committee on 23rd November 2020".*

This states quite clearly in the covering report recommendations and furthermore is covered in more detail in the second paragraph of the executive summary.

Therefore, the report that the Audit Committee debated and agreed democratically is the one being presented to the Council and does not need to be presented back to the Audit Committee.

However, it is certainly prudent to update the Council and residents of the broader position, particularly given the recent media debate around the cost of debt to the local taxpayer of the Council's treasury portfolio. So, wherever the Treasury Mid-Year report quite rightly demonstrates the level of supported debt that is funded from its regeneration, investment and self-financing schemes, it did not give the wider picture as to how much additional income is generated from its regeneration and investment programmes for the Council to be used in support of its revenue budgets, allowing it to continue to support the delivery of services for its residents.

That is why the covering report contains this information, not to replace or contradict the report agreed at Audit, but to provide more completeness and transparency for the residents of the Borough. I would also like to add that this income stream will not only continue but will increase as debt is repaid.

This enhanced information showing a more rounded position will, however, be reported to the future Audit Committee in line with our six-monthly reporting.

Supplementary Question

It has never appeared in any of the Treasury Management reports before and it has suddenly appeared now and this is after the Audit Committee approved this report. I do not understand why it was not brought to the Audit Committee at that particular time and why it has suddenly been added because it is something new. So my question then becomes who has the authority to add this information after the report has been approved by the Audit Committee because I think there is something very wrong going on here?

Supplementary Answer

As I said this was actually to complete, to actually add more transparency to the report and enhance the information showing a more rounded position. It will however be reported to the future Audit Committees in line with our six monthly reporting. The reason it is there is to add to transparency so people can actually see the transparency of that information. I regret that it has never been there before, it should have been, and it is there now.

71.6 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

With reference to the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report, can you advise whether there is any allowance within either the Children's Services budget, or within the Government funds to WBC for Covid-19 to cover additional facilities for IT/I-pads or laptops to our local children, who do not have these facilities and are therefore not able to learn effectively from home and whether WBC has provided any such facilities?

Answer

When the pandemic first started, and during the first lockdown, the Government announced the 'Get Help with Technology' scheme. Through that the Department for Education allocated about 700 laptops to Wokingham schools and most of these have now been delivered. There is an estimated shortfall of about 500 but on 12th January the Government announced that nationwide a further 300,000 laptops were going to be distributed. So, we are hoping that we will fill this gap. We are also working with the voluntary and community sector to get recycled IT equipment.

In addition to that since March 2020, 235 laptops have been provided to children with a social worker and 50 to children in care or care leavers who are leaving education and that is the Council's own laptops scheme which has been going for some time.

Supplementary Question

There is also a need to ensure that these facilities are able to be connected to schools, (i.e. the provision of a laptop on its own may only be half of the answer). Has this been included in the above figures or not and how many children has the Council assisted in this way?

Answer

Well obviously it is important otherwise you cannot use your laptop and we are relying on the schools to tell us when somebody needs these. There are however a number of mobile providers schools can tap into and so far it has not been an issue. We are using the Department for Education Covid related scheme to support children so they can access 4G and they are getting routers from us. But I want to stress that we are relying on the schools to tell us if anything is necessary in that area.

You could also help to spread the word that if somebody has any laptops at home they are not using it would be very useful if they could contact us and we could help to distribute those to the schools.

71.7 Prue Bray had asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question. However due to time constraints the question was not asked at the meeting and the written response below was provided.

Question

In relation to agenda item 75, the current contract for provision of services to counter domestic abuse expires later this year. I am pleased to see the retendering includes widening the scope of the service and additional money, which recognises the importance of this issue and the impact it has. However, I am slightly surprised that the decision on the contract rests with the Director of Community Insight and Change, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure. I fail to understand what domestic abuse has got to do with either Environment or Leisure. Surely the Executive Members and Directors covering adult and children's social care should be the people who should control the awarding of the contract, as they are the people most likely to understand what is required?

Answer

I can confirm this work is in the portfolio of the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, Parry Batth and the Director of Community Insight and Change. The Domestic Abuse Strategy and associated procurement is managed by the Community Safety Team which is part of the Directorate of Community Insight and Change. I am sure you agree that Domestic Abuse and Community Safety work hand in glove and can further reassure you that other directorates have been consulted regarding the procurement of this crucial contract.

71.8 Sarah Kerr had asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question. However due to time constraints the question was not asked at the meeting and the written response below was provided.

Question

The Wokingham Community Energy report states that WBC will be setting up WCE and undertaking publicity which would incur a cost. It also implies that WBC will be investing in the scheme itself by outlining the benefits such an investment might bring. However, the report also states that there are no financial implications for the Council for the next 3 years. Is this a mistake, or does the Council have no intention of investing in the scheme?

Answer

Thank you for the question, as this is an important point to clarify.

There are two types of 'finance' be referred too here. One which is direct investment into the Community energy fund, and the other, which is direct cost for the ongoing administrating, marketing and support of the scheme.

The Wokingham Community Energy (WCE) scheme will not incur significant financial expenditure for the Council for its set up or its running ongoing.

The Council may choose to invest and if we do this will be an investment which can be withdrawn at a point in time and therefore does not count as expenditure from an accounting perspective.

Running WCE scheme will not incur capital costs. The Energy Team within Commercial Property will be assigned as the 'Representative Council Officer' (as a member of WCE board) and will undertake additional tasks related to the project as an extension of their substantive role.

The initial council's support for promoting the scheme might be needed. However, WCE will fund its marketing and commercialisation material. WCE will take responsibility to organise publicity, advertising, leaflets and public meetings or other promotion of the share offer in the Wokingham Borough area.

Through this scheme, the Council can further develop on its tangible commitment to the Climate Emergency agenda within our limited financial resources and at virtually no risk to the Council.

So, to directly answer your question, Yes, we will be looking to invest into the scheme, but in terms of our ongoing financial exposure to fund the administration, compliance and marketing of the scheme, other than some officer time, is negligible.

71.9 Paul Fishwick had asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question. However due to time constraints the question was not asked at the meeting and the written response below was provided.

Question

There is a skills shortage of renewable engineers. Why is this not in the list of risks associated with this scheme and how does WBC plan to mitigate this risk?

Answer

Thank you for your question. This is another important point to clarify.

The Wokingham Community Energy fund will not be administered directly by the Council.

Services will be provided by our partner, Energy4All. Energy4All, who have experience in delivering renewable energy schemes across the country, is confident that they can resource implementation adequately. Being a national organisation they are also able to mitigate risks of skills shortages by redeploying resources should the need arise.

To provide a comparison, since 2016, Reading Community Energy Society, also supported by Energy4All, have supported the installation of 22 solar photovoltaic (PV) systems in total. Looking at their experience it is fair to suggest that capacity to deliver has not be affected by a gap in technical expertise.

More generally, as some of us learned last night, because of the focus on 'green recovery', and the Government's aspiration for a green industrial revolution, it is anticipated that there will be an increase demand in accessing skills for green jobs that will in time bolster the available workforce. However, this is expected to be gradual and scalable.

The Council is working closely with organisations such as The Thames Valley Berkshire LEP to both increase skills levels in the area and to match these with business needs and emergent sectors that will be key to future sustainable growth.

Recently, for example, a renewable energy Training Centre was launched in East Berkshire College. The Council is looking to promote green skills as part of this initiative and encourage training organisations to provide more technical skills training. We are also working with our local schools to engage young people with climate emergency issues and to offer insight into the skills needed for future.

The Council also works closely with businesses and developers to understand the skills needed linked to current and future developments. This includes negotiating employment and skills plans on major developments as part of the process of securing planning permission. Through these plans we are able to identify and fill in skills gaps, including those linked to more green methods of construction, and provide employment opportunities for local people.

72. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Executive considered a report setting out the major financial issues facing the Council which were required to be taken into account when setting the level of Council Tax.

During the introduction of the report the Executive Member for Finance and Housing highlighted that the Local Government Act 2003 required the Chief Finance Officer to report to Members, when setting the level of Council Tax, on the robustness of the budget presented and adequacy of reserves. Councillor Kaiser highlighted the letter that the Council had written to the Local Government Finance Settlement Team as its consultation response to the Local Government Finance Settlement, as set out in Appendix 2.

In response to a query from the Leader, Councillor Kaiser advised that due to operational issues usually only around 60% of the capital budget was spent per annum therefore the borrowing requirements may not be as high as stated. However, the Council needed to

ensure that sufficient borrowings were available in the event that all projects were completed.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Chief Finance Officer's (CFO) report and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks be noted, and that these be considered when setting the council tax for 2021/22 and agreeing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP);
- 2) the Council's response to the local government finance settlement, as set out in Appendix Two to the report, be noted;
- 3) the Council's ongoing representations for fairer funding for the residents of Wokingham Borough Council be supported.

73. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY 2020/21 - QUARTER 3

The Executive considered a report setting out the Revenue Budget monitoring position as at 31 December 2020 including the forecast outturn positions for 2020/21 for the Council's net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance, the Housing Revenue Account and the Schools' Block funding.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing drew Members' attention to a number of issues including the recommended carry forwards of £2,113m into the next financial year and an in-year supplementary estimate of £1.2m to fund priority Covid related activities as set out in report. In addition Councillor Kaiser identified other issues which were coming forward including increases in domestic abuse and fly-tipping which were requiring additional support from the Council.

Councillor Clark highlighted the underspend in Children's Services which had been achieved by closer control on spending as well as focussing on the service's strategic priorities. It was noted that the figures within the report were those predicted before the last lockdown so additional costs, as a result of the Council meeting its statutory duties, may come forward. Councillor Clark advised that she wished to thank all teachers and other school staff for the additional work they were having to carry out in very difficult times and for the fantastic job they were all doing.

In relation to the increase in fly-tipping Councillor Batth was pleased that additional funding was being made available which would enable additional CCTV cameras, extra signage etc to be purchased. It was also noted that zero tolerance was being adopted towards fly-tipping.

Councillor Margetts advised that the additional funds would help three areas in Adult Social Care. These included supporting the expansion of track and trace and the recently launched lateral flow test programme and would also provide support to GPs by assisting with buildings, staff and resources.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the significant financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis, as illustrated in the Executive Summary, be noted;

- 2) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report, be noted;
- 3) the potential General Fund carry forward requests of £2.113m as set out in Appendix B to the report be noted;
- 4) an in year supplementary estimate for £1.2m for Priority Covid-19 related issues, to be allocated by the Deputy Chief Executive (CFO) in consultation with the Lead Member of Finance and Housing, be approved;
- 5) an in year supplementary estimate for £16,000, for a review and refresh of the Council's Corporate Plan, be approved.

74. CAPITAL MONITORING 20/21 - END OF DECEMBER 2020

The Executive considered a report setting out the Capital Budget monitoring position up to 31 December 2020.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report and reiterated that historically only 60% of the capital budget was spent and this figure was likely to be less this year due to a number of reasons including the rephrasing of projects.

Councillor Halsall pointed out that the expected capital outturn forecast for the current financial year was showing at around 50%, which would have a significant impact on the Council's end of year borrowings.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) it be noted that the Council's Capital Programme has been reviewed and will continue to be throughout the year in the context of the impact of Covid-19 on funding sources and service requirements, and that any changes will be presented to Executive for approval;
- 2) the proposed rephrasing to the Capital Programme, following the 'in-year' review including the impact of Covid 19, as set out in paragraph 3 and Appendix B be noted and approved. There is no financial / service impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2021/2022;
- 3) the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 3 (to 31 December 2020) as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in Appendix A be noted;
- 4) Appendix C, which highlights capital performance by key activities, be noted. This is part of the Council's enhanced financial management focusing on the key capital projects, monitoring performance against budget and impact on funding levels (including borrowing);
- 5) £6.8m of ringfenced funded capital budget, provisionally programmed for 2021/2022, be brought forward into the current year (2020/2021), for the acceleration of the delivery of the SCAPE – Road Infrastructure project;

- 6) the addition to the 2020/21 capital programme of the development project for flats for vulnerable adults at Ryeish Green (Hyde End Lane, Spencer's Wood), funded from a ring - fenced grant of £647,627 from the National Health Service be noted and approved;
- 7) additional capital budget of £2.756m for Winnersh Triangle Park and Ride into the 2020/21 capital programme, funded by ring fenced grant (from LEP), third- party contributions and S106 contributions be noted and approved;
- 8) the contractual commitment of 2021/22 capital programme budget for the Carnival Pool Redevelopment for the value of £4m be noted and approved.

75. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REPORT 2020-21

The Executive considered a report setting out a summary of the Treasury Management operations during the first six months of 2020/2021.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing drew Members' attention to the table within the report which showed a net benefit per council tax payer, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date of £7.20, which was 0.47% of the average Band D council tax charge. Councillor Kaiser advised that this was achieved because the Council had assets which generated income which was not only used to pay interest on borrowings for those assets but borrowings for other projects eg forward funding infrastructure etc.

In addition, Councillor Kaiser mentioned the schemes that were being delivered using these borrowings which included, delivery of affordable homes and the regeneration of Wokingham town centre.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Appendix A, the Treasury Management Mid-Year report, which was agreed at Audit Committee on 23rd November 2020, be noted;
- 2) it be noted that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to and that prudent and safe management has been maintained;
- 3) the table in the report which shows the net benefit per council tax payer, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £7.20 which is 0.47% of the average band D council tax charge, be noted. This credit provides income to the Council to invest in its priority services;
- 4) the report be noted and recommended to Council.

76. WOKINGHAM COMMUNITY ENERGY (WCE)

The Executive considered a report relating to the Wokingham Community Energy (WCE) the aim of which was to create investment opportunities through a community share offering to encourage and facilitate a widespread uptake of the renewable energy installations within the Borough.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions advised that the intention was to work with Energy4All to establish the

Wokingham Community Energy fund. Councillor Murray clarified that the Council was not setting up an energy company and the partner it was looking to work with had been undertaking such schemes since 2002 and had set up such schemes for 28 other councils and numerous other organisations.

Councillor Murray explained that the purpose of a Community Energy fund was to set up and provide funding for buildings and structures, charities and other organisations eg scout huts, libraries, charity offices, community centres, churches etc who would not ordinarily be able to get funding to instal alternative energy generating methods on to their buildings.

It was noted during Councillor Murray's further explanation of the scheme that it did not require the Council to put up any significant investment in order to be able to establish the fund however the Council did have the opportunity to become an investor in the Community Energy fund if it wished in the future.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council partner with the Wokingham Community Energy (WCE) Scheme.

77. THE HEALTHY CHILD PROGRAMME

The Executive considered a report relating to the procurement of the Healthy Child Programme for Wokingham alongside West Berkshire and Reading councils.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised the meeting that the Council had a statutory duty to provide a Healthy Child Programme which consists of health visiting of children between 0-5, anti-natal and post-natal support and school nursing.

The current contract was due to expire in March 2022 therefore the Council were looking to start a new contract in April 2022, running for three years with an opportunity to cancel the contract or extend for another year. Councillor Clark advised that the preferred option was to procure the new contract in collaboration with Berkshire and Reading Councils as this would provide combined purchase power and therefore likely to attract a larger provider. The intention was that Wokingham would still have its own service level agreement and would set its own KPIs.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) procurement of the healthy child programme in collaboration with West Berkshire and Reading local authorities be agreed;
- 2) authority to proceed with necessary governance and process decisions to enable the award of contract be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive and the Head of Public Health, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services.

78. THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSED APPROACH TO POVERTY

The Executive considered a report setting out the Council's proposed approach to addressing poverty and deprivation in line with the strategic aims of the Community Vision to develop safe and strong communities and enrich lives.

The Leader of Council went through the report, which set out the Council's approach to poverty, and highlighted the five core blocks of work as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Council's approach to addressing poverty as set out in the report be endorsed.

79. TEMPORARY CLOSURE REMENHAM FOOTPATH NO. 4 HENLEY FESTIVAL

The Executive considered a report setting out a request for the temporary closure of Remenham Footpath No 4 in order to allow the Henley Festival to be organised and run in a safe manner whilst enabling residents and visitors to continue to use the footpath via a short detour.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure introduced the report and advised that the application, for the temporary closure of the footpath in order that a stage could be built for the event, was one that was received annually from the Festival Trust.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the making of an order for the closure of Footpath Remenham No 4, for a closure of an 80m section of the footpath for the set up and de rig of the Festival stage from Monday 5th to Wednesday 7th July 2021 inclusive and from Monday 12th July to Tuesday 13th July 2021 inclusive be approved;
- 2) within the closure a 620m section for evening performances from Wednesday 7th July to Sunday 11th July 2021 inclusive and day time performances on Saturday 10th July and Sunday 11th July 2021, under Section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 be included, subject to the receipt of the requisite consent of the Secretary of State for Transport.

80. DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

The Executive considered a report which sought agreement to procure a new domestic abuse support services contract and set out the timetable to ensure that a new contract would be in place when the current contract expires at the end of June 2021.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure introduced the report and advised that the Council was responsible for commissioning domestic abuse support for individuals who were identified as being at high or medium risk from harm. The services provided would include a helpline, access to independent domestic abuse advocates, outreach children and young people support, group-based programmes and refuge support.

Councillor Batth advised that the demand on domestic abuse services had increased substantially since 2018 which had led to additional short-term funding of £35,000 being required to ensure service quality and safe caseloads within the commissioned service. Additional funding, based on the increased demand for services and additional statutory duties that were expected to be placed on local authorities, of £150,000 had been requested for the 21/22 financial year increasing by a further £35,000 in 22/23.

Councillor Haitham Taylor informed the meeting that since 2018-19, 2.4m people aged between 16-74 were victims of domestic abuse, with two thirds of those being female. It was highlighted that domestic abuse was not limited to physical violence and the new Bill, which had been taken through Parliament last year, recognised other forms of abuse including emotional, controlling and economic abuse. Councillor Haitham Taylor was therefore pleased that the Council was raising awareness of domestic abuse and investing more in the services to support victims and survivors and also help perpetrators change their behaviours.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a new domestic abuse support contract, of an initial period of 5 years with an option to add a further two years to the contract period with a total contract value of £1,554,000, be procured;
- 2) authority be delegated to the Director of Community Insight and Change, in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, to award the contract(s) to the successful bidder(s) following completion of the evaluation process;
- 3) it be noted that following a review of the local demand levels and service performance additional growth has been requested through the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

81. PROPOSED NEW RESOURCE BASE FOR SECONDARY AGED CHILDREN

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to deliver an appropriate resource based provision for secondary aged children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and social emotional and mental health needs in Wokingham.

The Executive Member for Children's Services went through the report and advised the meeting that having such a resource base would enable children to stay in mainstream school with the ability to use the resource base when required.

Councillor Clark clarified that the proposed resource was a replacement for the previous resource base that existed at St Crispin's Secondary School but due to the cost of places being unsustainably high the service level agreement had been terminated in April 2019. It was confirmed that children who were currently present at St Crispin's would continue to stay there until their compulsory education was completed.

It was noted that the intention was that the new resource base would admit five children in year 7 every year from September 2021 until there were 25 children in years 7-11 by 2025.

RESOLVED: That the proposal to commission a new secondary resource base in Wokingham, including revenue and capital costs, be approved.

82. DELIVERING THE GORSE RIDE REGENERATION PROJECT - CONFIRMATION OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDER

(Councillor UllaKarin Clark declared a personal interest in this item)

The Executive considered a report which provided an update on the progress made to deliver the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project, including the use of compulsory purchase powers to enable all necessary land interests to be acquired to secure the delivery of the regeneration of Gorse Ride and the consequential benefits to the local community.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised the meeting that this was the most ambitious housing project that the Council had ever embarked upon and would improve the existing Gorse Ride estate through the demolition of the poor quality housing which were not economically viable to repair and which were not fit for purpose. The intention therefore was to replace these dwellings with 200 well designed houses which would be constructed to current standards. In addition, the scheme would be integrated

within the existing landscape, improve the area by the planting 200 new trees on the site. as well as the creation of a new village green.

Councillor Kaiser advised that the Council had been in constant dialogue and consultation had been carried out with residents, the Tenants' Association, the local parish council, and Ward Members. CPO measures would only be used in very extreme circumstances once all other means of negotiation had been exhausted. It was noted that the Council had given a commitment to the current residents that if they were moved out of their homes and wished to return to Gorse Ride once the development has been completed, they would be provided with one of the new properties.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) agrees that the Council should make a compulsory purchase order ("CPO") to acquire the land as shown indicatively edged red and shaded pink on the draft plan at Appendix 1 of the report ("the Land") required to deliver the proposed regeneration of land known as land at Gorse Ride South, Finchampstead, Wokingham ("the Site") pursuant to section 226(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) ("the 1990 Act") because it considers that:
 - a. the acquisition of the Land will facilitate the carrying out of the development, redevelopment or improvement of the Site;
 - b. the development, redevelopment or improvement of the Site is likely to contribute to the achievement of any one or more of the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Borough of Wokingham; and
 - c. there is a compelling case in the public interest for the CPO.
- 2) the Deputy Chief Executive be authorised, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Finance, to:
 - a. take all necessary steps in relation to the Land to secure the making, the confirmation and the implementation of the CPO including publication and service of all relative notices and the presentation of the Council's case at any Public Inquiry; and
 - b. approve terms for the acquisition of legal interests (including rights if required) by agreement including for the purposes of resolving any objections to the CPO.
- 3) if the CPO is confirmed, to the extent that it is not already held for such purposes, that that part of the Site already within the Council's ownership shown shaded green on the plan, at Appendix 2 of the report, be appropriated for planning purposes as described in section 226 of the 1990 Act on the date immediately before the Council implements the confirmed CPO by the making of a vesting declaration or service of notice to treat/notice of entry, such land being then no longer required for the purpose for which it is currently held.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.54 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Malcolm Richards, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, Andy Croy, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Ken Miall and Andrew Mickleburgh

Officers Present

Matthew Booth, SEN Consultant
Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services
Adam Davis, Assistant Director Children's Social Care
Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact
Kelli Scott, Interim Service Manager, Children with Disabilities and Early Help
Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships

41. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Malcolm Richards was appointed Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

42. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor UllaKarin Clark.

43. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 November were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date; subject to a change on page 18 under the third bullet point so that it would read as follows:

Councillor Richards asked if there were any statistics available in relation to the educational outcomes for Wokingham's children who were attending colleges; he believed that children who stayed at a school sixth form tended to do better academically.

44. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

46. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

47. UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

48. CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Children's Services Performance Indicators report was presented by Nick Hammond, Service Manager Intelligence and Impact.

Members were pleased with the report format and the timeliness of the information provided.

The following comments were made in relation to each dashboard:

Dashboard Item 1 – Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP)

- In response to a question Nick Hammond stated that the reason for the decline in the timeliness of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks of referral in Q3 was due to a number of factors, including an increase in complexity of needs which slowed down assessments, and staff changes. However, this was already improving with 100% completion having been achieved in December and January;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships stated that the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) team had been operating with a number of locum staff which had now moved on. Permanent staff had now been recruited, however the churn of staff had impacted on the timeliness of assessments.

Councillor Blumenthal suggested that a key be added to report to make it clearer if the arrows are being benchmarked in relation to national or local indicators.

Dashboard Item 2 – Early Help

- Nick Hammond stated that the number of referrals and assessments for Early Help services has significantly increased;
- Members were interested to know if this increase was occurring as a result of the pandemic;
- Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care stated that an increase in referrals had been expected after the summer, but that it had not materialised. The service was starting to look at themes and how to group it into categories;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that the service was conscious of the impact on staff of the different way of working;
- Adam Davis stated that the service was currently managing the demand for services, but this was kept under review;
- Adam Davis stated that given the significant increase in the number of referrals, it was positive that the average length of time between referral and assessment had only gone up only marginally.

Dashboard 3 – Children's Social Care Front Door

- Nick Hammond stated that there had been a reduction on the number of referrals in Q3;
- Members were interested to know how the service would deal with a Child In Care (CIC) who lost a loved one during the pandemic. Adam Davis stated that this would be dealt with in the same way as with any bereavement involving a CIC;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that measures had been put in place to deal with potential increase in demand; such as providing additional support for front door, by drawing up resources from other areas. There was capacity within the service;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that it was possible that there were unidentified needs due to the current lack of direct contact with children.

Dashboard Item 4 – Child Protection

- Nick Hammond stated that there was a significant increase in the number of children with plans in Q3;

- Nick Hammond pointed out that there was a commitment to carry out face to face visits as much as possible, with the percentage of virtual visits being below 6%;
- In response to a question, Adam Davis stated that only a small number of people had been worried about Covid security during visits;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that further analysis was needed to understand the impact of the pandemic on the percentage of children starting a plan who had a previous one in the last two years.

Dashboard Item 5 – Children In Care

- Nick Hammond drew attention the significant improvement in the percentage of CIC who have more than one allocated Social Worker in 12 months;
- Members were very pleased to note the improvement and asked what led to it. Adam Davis stated that the service had undertaken a lot of work to improve recruitment, retention and creating stability;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that having a stable workforce was a continuous aspiration;
- Members were interested to know if there was a reason that the number of CIC in Wokingham was significant lower than other areas in the South East and if there was a danger that children were being missed out;
- Adam Davis stated that the service had looked into this and there were various different themes: the demographics; the prevention services being really good; the high number of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and the high number of adoptions;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that CIC had different visit requirements (in relation to frequency) depending on each individual circumstance.

Dashboard Item 6 – Care Leavers

- Members were interested to know if Care Leavers were being given priority into the new employment and work experience initiative being promoted by the Council, and if there were any particular concerns about how they were coping during the pandemic;
- Adam Davis was not aware of any ring-fencing for Care Leavers in relation to the Kick Start Programme;
- Adam Davis stated that Care Leavers were receiving additional support during this time from Here4You and PA's;
- Members were concerned by the number of Care Leavers who were Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) and asked how the service was looking to improve this situation;
- Carol Cammiss, Director of Children's Services stated that a new member of staff had recently been employed to specifically look at this. Options around work experience, working with local businesses, training opportunities and others would be considered. She also stated that this was something that the service was committed to improving, she believed that improvements would be seen in the next six months;
- Carol Cammiss stated that Virtual School had recently extended its offer Post-16 education, it was expected that this would make a significant difference to the numbers.

Dashboard Item 7 – Children Missing from Home/Care

- Members were concerned about the high number of Permanent Exclusions, especially during the pandemic when less children are attending school. Sal Thirlway stated that the service was working with schools, trying to understand the reasons for this number, he offered to provide an answer outside of the meeting;

- Members asked that a breakdown of the number of children with SEND who are permanently excluded be provided every quarter, and if possible also by gender and ethnicity;
- Members asked if permanently excluded children were being able to access learning remotely. Sal Thirlway stated that those children who were permanently excluded were placed in alternative schools/provisions and there was an effort to minimise the disruption to their education;
- Members asked if there was a correlation between the number of children missing from education and the current pandemic. Sal Thirlway believed that it was unlikely that the five children missing from education listed in the report were as a result of the pandemic;
- Sal Thirlway explained that under the current rules parents were not compelled to send their children into school, therefore those children would not be classified as missing from education;
- Members asked to receive information in relation to school attendance data. Carol Cammiss agreed to provide a report with this information;
- In response to a question Sal Thirlway stated that around 12% of the children who would normally attend school were currently attending school. The current attendance for children with EHCP or with a Social Worker was around 41% to 42%;
- Sal Thirlway stated that the service was working and engaging with families of children who were eligible to attend school but choosing not to attend, to ascertain what was best for the child;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the situation was constantly under review, it was necessary to balance the needs of certain children to be in school with the school's ability to operate under the current restrictions;
- Adam Davis stated that number of CIC attending school under this lockdown is significantly higher than previously, at around 60%.

Dashboard Item 8 – Children's Services Workforce

- Nick Hammond stated that had been a significant improvement in the permanency of workforce;
- In response to a question Carol Cammiss stated that Social Workers left for a range of reasons, the service conducted exit interviews and tracked the reasons. She pointed out that the numbers were much improved from previous years, and that there was now a stable workforce;
- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that the service was looking to review the offer to keep it attractive to the workforce. The service was always looking at new ways of recruiting new and experienced Social Workers and retaining staff by providing a supportive environment.

RESOLVED That the report be noted and that data on permanent exclusion of children with SEND and school attendance would be provided to the Committee.

49. SEND STRATEGY

The SEN Strategy report was presented by Matthew Booth, SEN Consultant.

Sal Thirlway stated that the service had undergone an inspection in 2019 which had identified the need for producing a new SEND Strategy to replace the existing one.

Some of the comments made by Matthew Booth during his presentation are listed below:

- The consultation had now finished and the results would be shared with the Committee;
- The Local Authority has huge legal responsibilities in relation to the education of SEND children, but limited resources to deliver services. Therefore, it was important to work in partnership with all the stakeholders;
- There was an aspiration that Wokingham continue to be a great place for children and young people with SEND to grow up;
- The strategy contained a needs analysis with facts and figures. The understanding of the needs was continuing to improve, including predicting what the needs might be in the future;
- There had been support from stakeholders in relation to co-producing the strategy and also challenges in relation to the delivery of the strategy;
- The number of children with EHCPs and SEND needs was growing at a much higher pace than the population growth;
- Feedback from carers and parents was included in the strategy;
- Wokingham's position in relation to SEND challenges was similar to those faced by other local authorities;
- The priorities (as listed in the report) intended to improve services for children and young people with SEND and their families;
- There was an effort to improve provision within the Borough;
- Improving transitions was one of the areas that the strategy was focusing upon;
- Using data more efficiently was part of the strategy;
- The details of how the strategy was going to be measured were explained in the report, including key performance indicators;
- 50 full responses to the consultation were received, which was positive; the feedback received was encouraging and challenging;
- Conversations with partners were being undertaken to decide how the services would be resourced, in the context of the financial demands to deliver the strategy; funding models were being reviewed;
- The public sector equality duty would be further refined for the final assessment.

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

- In response to a question Matthew Booth stated that one of the main differences between this strategy and the previous one was the element of co-production and engagement with partners; he believed it was also more evidence based;
- In addition, Carol Cammiss stated that the previous strategy was educationally centred, whereas this was a local area partnership piece of work;
- Members noted that the number of boys with EHCPs and SEND needs was significantly higher than the number of girls; and asked if there was a reason for this and wondered if girls were being missed out and potentially not getting the help which they needed;
- Members also asked if the data could be broken down further, by gender and ethnicity;
- Matthew Booth stated that Health professionals had explained that behaviour signifiers showed up earlier for boys for certain disorders; there was concern by Health partners that girls were being diagnosed later;
- Members suggested that there could be cultural reasons that girls were not having their needs identified and suggested that this be investigated;
- Members questioned why there had been a drop in the number of EHCPs after KS2;
- Matthew Booth stated that educational professionals had explained to him that at KS2 education became more formal, thus was important to address needs so that the

children did not fall further behind; he also added that KS2 had the highest volume of children in education;

- In response to a question Matthew Booth stated that one of the major strands of work in the action plan was a resource space review, to maximise the utilisation of local places;
- Members believed that the new strategy was much improved from the previous one, and congratulated Carol Cammiss and her team on the work they had undertaken to produce the strategy;
- Members questioned the statement that Wokingham was a great place for children to grow up, in that there were some areas of deprivation in the Borough, and perhaps this was not a statement that was true for everyone. Matthew Booth stated that some parent and carers groups had also pointed out that there was much improvement still needed in the services provided for SEND children in the Borough in relation to that statement. This may still be reviewed in order to strike the right nuance;
- Sal Thirlway stated that SEND Improvement Board would continue and that strategy would be co-delivered in partnership with stakeholders;
- Carol Cammiss stated that improving the outcomes for children was the focus of the service.

RESOLVED That the Committee noted and supported the SEND Strategy.

50. CHILD EXPLOITATION

The Child Exploitation report was presented by Kelli Scott, Interim Service Manager, Children With Disabilities and Early Help.

Kelli Scott stated that the report provided an overview of what constituted child exploitation and Council's response to it through contextual safeguarding.

Kelly Scott stated that the strategic response to Child Exploitation involved a series of partnership meetings at strategic level, aiming to understand and mitigate risk factors at an individual and community level through relationship based practice and disruption techniques.

Kelly Scott stated that the operational response to Child Exploitation was delivered through: Early Help provision; Statutory Social Work Services; KICKS Project; Youth Mentoring; Positive Pathways Project and Youth Offending Service.

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

- Members noted that the report did not contain data and asked if this could be provided;
- Kelly Scott stated that a decision had been made not to include data in order to avoid potential identification;
- Carol Cammiss stated that the data was confidential and she would investigate the possibility of being able to share this data;
- In response to a question Kelli Scott stated that partnership working was being developed in relation to contextual safeguarding;
- Members were concerned that it was not possible to know the scale of the problem without knowing the numbers. Carol Cammiss agreed to look into the possibility of presenting the data in a Part 2 session;

- In response to a question Kelli Scott stated that professionals were increasingly able to recognise/identify and respond to child exploitation, and therefore aware of more cases;
- In response to a question Kelli Scott stated that there was generally more awareness of child exploitation resulting from national and local campaigns.

Members recognised that this was a difficult area of work and thanked Kelli Scott for the report.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) Future reports on Child Exploitation would include data whenever possible and the use of Part 2 to enable this would be explored.

51. COMPASS TEAM UPDATE

Adam Davis presented the Compass Team update report.

Adam Davis stated that the Compass Team had been set up to address gaps that had been identified in the provision of services. The focus of the team was to work with children at the edge of care and to support children to remain in placements for as long as appropriate.

The report contained details about the staff in the team and how it was developed.

Adam Davis stated that positive results had already been achieved since the establishment of the team.

Members suggested the inclusion of figures on outcomes to measure the impact of team in future reports.

In response to a question Adam Davis stated that he believed that the team had the appropriate number of staff at the moment, but this would be kept under review.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

52. MEASURES TAKEN TO REDUCE THE NEED FOR CHILDREN TO RETURN TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

Adam Davis presented the Measure taken to reduce the need for children to return to a child protection plan report.

Adam Davis pointed out to the statistics in the report, including benchmarking.

Adam Davis stated that Childrens Services monitored the number of children becoming subject to a protection plan on a monthly basis and there was a specific indicator for the numbers becoming subject to a Protection plan for a second or subsequent time. This number fluctuated and could be influenced by a number of factors. Benchmarking against other Local Authorities and our statistical neighbours is an important component in assessing where we are. Despite “in year” peaks, Wokingham Borough Council remains below the average of statistical neighbours (communities that are similar). We collect information about children becoming subject to Child Protection plans either in the

previous 2 years and ever in their lifetime in order to test the impact of recent interventions and decision making, to give an idea of how practice is improving or otherwise.

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

- In response to a question Adam Davis stated that the term statistical neighbours referred to local authorities that had similar population demographics and they may not be neighbouring authorities;
- Members questioned the impact of the pandemic in relation to putting children on plans. Adam Davis did not believe that there was a more risk averse approach which was resulting in more children being put on a plan. He stated that decisions were made in a multi-agency process.

Members were pleased with the impact of the measures being put in place to reduce the need for children to return to a child protection plan and thanked Adam Davis for the report.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

53. FORWARD PLAN

Members asked about the vaccination programme in relation to Addington School. Carol Cammiss stated that there had been an issue with the interpretation of the legislation, this had now been resolved.

Members noted that it was positive that all staff in Foundry College and Northern House had now been vaccinated.

The Chairman asked that a date for the Briefing be identified in March, before the next meeting.

Members asked that 'inclusion' be included in the Diversity and Equality at Schools item. Carol Cammiss suggested to add inclusion as an item later on in the year. Members agreed with this approach and felt that it was important to gather data around diversity and equality issues in schools in order to monitor it.

The Chairman stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee would be discussing ideas for the forward plan for the next municipal year at its next meeting. Some Members suggested the following items:

- Work opportunities for Care Leavers
- Update on the take up of the provision of free sanitary products
- Virtual School update

54. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Carol Cammiss addressed the Committee and made the following statement:

Our education community has suffered a number of losses recently, with the passing of staff across a number of schools. Two members of staff, the Care Taker at St Teresa's Catholic Academy, the Co-Head of Year 10 from Bulmershe School have died from Covid related illnesses. Additionally Jay Blundell, Headteacher at the Foundry College, passed away at the weekend following a short period of illness.

All of these colleagues will be missed by their own school community as well as the broader education system within the Borough; and our thoughts are with their families, friends, colleagues and pupils who knew them well, at this very sad time. We are working with all schools to provide support from our educational psychology service and our school improvement service.

The Chairman asked Carol Cammiss to pass on the Committee's sympathy to the schools involved.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: John Kaiser

Also Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Helen Thompson, Ernst and Young
Michael Bateman, Children's Services Complaints Manager
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Daneet Penny, Customer Delivery Officer
Mark Thompson, Chief Account
Bob Watson, Assistant Director - Finance
Jackie Whitney, Service Manager Customer Services Operations

36. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

37. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

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

Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned why the Treasury Management Report that had been considered by the Audit Committee at its November meeting had been changed prior to its consideration by the Executive. The Assistant Director Finance explained that the report presented to Executive was the same as that presented to Audit Committee and was attached as Appendix A to a covering report. The covering report of the Council's Section 151 officer had included additional information as the Executive needed to be kept updated on the Council's latest position. Councillor Gee was of the view that the report agreed by the Audit Committee was not the same as that considered by the Executive. She stated that an extra £1million had been offset against the finance costs which was a big change and the cost of debt per household would go from £7.52 to a benefit of £7.20. She went on to say that that the Treasury Management report was usually presented in February and did not come with a covering report. Councillor Shepherd-DuBey commented that part of the remit of the Audit Committee was to make recommendations about Treasury Management and that she felt that there had been a breach of the Constitution. The Assistant Director Governance clarified the Audit Committee's remit, referring to 4.4.3.1 j) and k) of the Constitution. He confirmed that the Constitution had been complied with. Councillor King suggested that the process could be looked at for the future.

Councillors Gee and Shepherd-DuBey believed the report considered by the Executive had been amended and therefore should be presented to the Audit Committee again. The Assistant Director Governance commented that the Audit Committee had needed to seek assurance about whether the prudential indicators had been complied with or not. The

Committee were considering the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/24 that evening and recommending it for consideration at the February Council meeting.

Councillor Gee emphasised that the Committee had recommended that a particular version of the report be recommended to the Executive and this had not happened. The Assistant Director Finance reiterated that the report agreed by Audit Committee in November 2020 had been presented unamended to the Executive. He went on to explain why, in addition to the information approved by the Audit Committee, the covering report had contained more information around the Council's financial position. The Assistant Director Governance confirmed that it was entirely in accordance with the duties of the Council's Section 151 officer, that he brought relevant financial information to the attention of the Executive. Councillor Shepherd-DuBey stated that section 12.1.13.5 of the Constitution stated that '...the Chief Finance Officer shall provide a mid-year and annual report to the Audit Committee prior to being approved by Council, on the exercise of the treasury management powers delegated, treasury management performance and on any material departure from the code of practice' and that the report provided had not been the same as that which had been taken forward. She queried why the Monitoring Officer had permitted what she considered to be an amended report, to be presented to the Executive. The Assistant Director Governance informed the Committee that there had been no breaches of the Constitution as the report agreed by the Committee had been presented in full to the Executive.

38. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

39. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

40. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

41. FORMAL COMPLAINTS - QUARTER 3 SUMMARY

The Committee received the Formal Complaints – Quarter 3 Summary.

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

- The establishment of the Complaints Focus Group was starting to show results:
 - Early intervention and resolution of complaints, preventing unnecessary escalation.
 - Better reporting - resulting in a rise of early resolution cases reported, 52 in Q3 compared to 4 in Q2.
 - Directorate reps taking ownership to input into their services.
 - Progressing actions to address the insight.
- The Complaints Focus Group had established some of the key reasons that people complained; a lack of clear and accessible information about process and procedure and how this resulted in transparency issues around how decisions are made and; impact of social distancing rules and a knock-on effect on cold weather related complaints such as heating and other maintenance issues.
- The number of complaints received had increased by 32% compared with Q2. The rise in complaints for Q3 compared to Q2, was partly due to demand for Housing repairs over the winter. Covid restrictions and social distancing meant that

- contractors had not been able to complete as many maintenance calls per day, which had led to some customer dissatisfaction.
- Actions produced from the Complaints Focus Group were
 - to ensure that there was clear guidance on what was considered a complaint and how this might differ from unhappiness with a decision;
 - Tenant Services to request regular updates from contractors on maintenance call outs and for any delays to be communicated early to manage tenant expectations more effectively;
 - A log had been developed in Children's Services so that learning from complaints could be recorded.
 - Lockdown had had an effect on complaint numbers and services had been affected differently. Complaint numbers had steadily increased with the easing of the first lockdown, despite the second and third lockdowns.
 - Complaints relating to services within Resources and Assets, Place and Growth and Children's Services made up a third of all complaints received.
 - The Children's Services Complaints Manager informed the Committee of complaints received under the Children's Act under Q3. 12 complaints had been received under the Children's Act statutory Children's Services complaints process. 3 of these were considered to be out of scope, 4 complaints were resolved following discussions with service users and 5 received formal Stage 1 responses. During Q3 there had been 3 Stage 2 complaints and 3 Stage 3 panels. 22 formally received compliments had been received during the period, an increase on Q2.
 - The Service Manager Customer Services Operations indicated that the Complaints Focus Group was progressing actions to address the insight highlighted under 4 headings:
 - Current environment;
 - Poor behaviours;
 - Lack of customer connection;
 - Lack of process management.
 - The priorities for the next quarter were as follows:
 - Better recording of complaints, for both formal and early resolution cases.
 - Rebranding of complaints ethos and information into a '*Voice of the Customer*' theme – internal and external.
 - Redrafting and branding of the complaints policy, including clearer definitions around what is a service request versus a complaint.
 - New online complaint webpage and form designed to give the customer all the information they need in one place.
 - Better triaging of complaints received via the online form, before being directed to the appropriate team.
 - Clearer internal communication around how to deal with complaints, using the directorate reps and improved tools to help teams.
 - Training on how to deal with complaints, including the right communication methods, promotion of empathy and using plain English when writing responses. that under the
 - Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked what the difference was between Stage 1, 2 and 3 complaints, and how they progressed from stage to stage. The Service Manager Customer Services Operations outlined the different stages. The complainant could request for their complaint to be escalated.
 - Early Resolution - an officer from the service area concerned would have a discussion with the customer.
 - Stage 1 – an investigation of the complaint and a formal written response sent by the relevant team leader or manager.

- Stage 2 – an independent investigation on behalf of the Assistant Director or Director by the Customer Relations Team.
- Stage 3 – referral to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman or a Review Panel in the case of social care complaints.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked whether complaints were received via letter and was informed that they were mostly received via email or verbal but that some letters were received.
- Councillor Sargeant noted that the number of complaints being escalated to the Ombudsman was increasing over time. He asked whether there was a particular trend that was causing this. He also noted that of the 9 complaints escalated to the Ombudsman in Q3, 3 were still under review, and questioned when the Committee would be informed of the outcome of these. The Service Manager Customer Services Operations stated that during the first lockdown the Ombudsman had closed and had not reopened until June, so they had had a backlog once they had reopened which the investigators were slowly working through. In terms of those still outstanding, the next quarter report would report on those which had since been resolved.
- Councillor Gee commented that the report was easy to understand.

RESOLVED: That the Formal Complaints – Quarter 3 Summary be noted.

42. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021/24

The Assistant Director Finance presented the Treasury Management Strategy 2021/24.

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

- The report formed part of the Council's budget setting process and was forward looking.
- In the prudential limits it was the Council's parameters for borrowing and investing by the Finance Treasury Team that the Committee was asked to review.
- The style of presentation had changed to make the report less technical and more easy to read.
- Members were informed that an addendum of some additional changes had been circulated.
- He commented that the series of ratios of financing costs to net revenue streams detailed on page 59 of the agenda had also been amended. They were now 1.03%, 0.36% and 0.30%. The first one (1.03%) was based on a firm recommended budget to Council and the other two were based on the indicative budget and would be revised and reviewed prior to the following year's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The Assistant Director Finance highlighted the following key changes to the Strategy which were to enhance the options available to the treasury team for daily management of cash funds, short term investing and borrowing.
 - The option to be able to open a deposit account, with our transactional bank provider which will increase capacity to invest money in the short term (increase liquidity), particularly during current times of cashflow uncertainty.
 - To increase the money market (liquid funds) limit from £5million to £10million which will increase capacity to invest money in the short term (increase liquidity), particularly during current times of cashflow uncertainty.
 - The option to issue a local authority bond to raise borrowing as an alternative to traditional markets such as PWLB.

- Councillor Burgess asked about the net benefit from borrowing figure, which represented a change in Treasury Management reporting. At previous Committee meetings Members had been told that the net cost of borrowing was £7.52 per taxpayer, but now the cost of borrowing created a net benefit of £13.64. She questioned what relevance the treasury investment income had to the cost of borrowing. The Assistant Director Finance commented that it had moved to £13.64 because when the Treasury Management Mid Year report had been produced it was only taking out the cost of borrowing and the cost of borrowing was based on the budgeted costs of debt finance within the budget. The amount that had come in from the invest to save and income generation projects had been extracted. The whole impact effects of those projects had not been included. A more realistic position would be to show not just the amount of money that the projects had generated to offset the debt financing cost, but the whole benefit to the Council. Providing more information provided a fuller, more transparent picture of the Council's situation.
- It was prudent to offset the treasury investments because there were two potential budget lines within the Treasury department: the cost of borrowing and the return on investment. When establishing the net cost of borrowing, the money received from investments, invest to saves and regeneration projects was taken off. The net credit that these projects generated were also shown.
- Officers were providing a picture of the actual impact of borrowing on the taxpayer.
- Councillor Burgess commented that in the past the Committee had been provided with a summary of external borrowing, internal borrowing and also a total borrowing figure. She questioned why the presentation of this had changed and if the total borrowing figure was rising up to £678m by 2023/24. The Assistant Director Finance commented that in terms of supporting the Capital Programme it was the level of borrowing that the Council would be moving to but that this figure also included internal borrowing.
- With regards to the investment strategy Councillor Burgess asked how the Finance Team assessed the risk of negative interest rates in terms of likelihood and the impact that it would have and was informed that Officers tried to avoid using negative interest rates hence the request to increase the amount that could be put into money market funds.
- Councillor Burgess asked if there was a limit to how low the Council's instant access cash balances could fall. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that the Council had a managed cash flow position and Officers sought to set a daily balance that left approximately between £100,000-200,000 for any emergency transactions. It was based on the liquidity of funds.
- Councillor Sargeant praised the presentation of the report. With regards to the asset value, debt levels and repayment profiles, he questioned what valuation methods had been used for assets. The Assistant Director Finance commented that the asset value was shown as per the balance sheet. The Chief Accountant added that in terms of asset value, the balance sheet had been used and the capital programme for the next 3 years added to give the £1.4billion of asset value. Assets included investment properties which were reviewed every year at market value, and schools and roads which were valued on replacement cost. The increase over the 3 years was mirrored by an increase in an investment in the Capital Programme. Members were reminded that if the Council tried to sell some of the assets and realise a capital receipt for them, it would potentially be a higher value. For example, with land you could potentially get planning permission which would boost the value of the asset.

- Councillor Gee suggested that the total borrowing figures were now slightly different due to changes made. Officers agreed to look at this.
- Councillor Gee asked about the financing cost and net revenue stream that was predicted last year compared to this year. She questioned whether the basis for calculating this had changed between this year and last year. She asked whether income from treasury investments had been included in the previous year's calculation, and if the housing, economy and local regeneration had also been included. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that the calculation had changed this year. The annual financing costs were £2.1million but the gross level of expenditure that was divided by had changed. The net revenue streams were the amount estimated to be met from Government grants and taxpayers. The gross revenue expenditure was part of a balanced budget. The Council set a budget which was offset where the expenditure equalled the income.
- Councillor Gee commented that it would have been helpful to redo the calculation for the previous year. She asked what income was under housing, economy and local regeneration. It was noted that this was money coming in from the regeneration projects. Rental income was used to partly repay financing costs.
- Councillor Gee questioned the inclusion of rental income. The Assistant Director Finance explained how the CIPFA Code had been complied with.
- Councillor Gee queried how the numerator had changed.
- With regards to the benefit per Band D property, Councillor Gee questioned whether the cost of managing properties, the cost of commercial investment or treasury investment and the direct cost of staff, were included. The Assistant Director Finance stated that the Treasury team were funded by the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The Chief Accountant agreed to provide a breakdown of realisable and non-realizable assets.
- In response to a question regarding the investment portfolio, the Assistant Director Finance indicated that part of this was included in housing, economy and local regeneration and also in commercial investments. Councillor Shepherd-DuBey commented that the Council should not be investing in properties outside of the Borough. The Assistant Director Finance stated that the Government policy on investing outside a local authority area had been amended and the Council was in compliance with this amendment.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Committee supports this report including the changes included in the addendum contained within the supplementary agenda, and recommend it to Executive on 18 February 2021. (Executive will then be asked to recommend the report to Council);
- 2) the Treasury Management Strategy including the amendments as set out in Appendix A including the following additional appendices, be approved;
 - Prudential Indicators (Appendix B)
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix C)
 - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D)
- 3) the Committee note the cumulative financial impact on the Council of its borrowing activities equates to a net benefit for the taxpayer per band D of £13.64 at end of 2021/22 and noting the net benefit increase to £62.86 at the end of 2023/24.

Agenda Item 5

Decision made in the presence of:
Andrew Kupusarevic, Senior Specialist - Income, Payments and Recovery
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Members in attendance: Maria Gee and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION RECORD SHEET IMD 2021/06
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Title of the report	Write off of Non-Collectable Business Rates Debt.
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Finance and Housing - John Kaiser
ACTION BY Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
DECISION MADE ON 08 February 2021

Recommendation contained in the report

That the Executive Member for Finance and Housing agrees to write-off as unrecoverable the outstanding Business Rates debt of £97,321.98 as detailed within this report.

Decision

That the Executive Member for Finance and Housing agreed to write-off as unrecoverable the outstanding Business Rates debt of £97,321.98 as detailed within the report.

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	None
Monitoring Officer	None
Leader of the Council	None

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

N/A

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

None

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

None

PUBLISHED ON: 8 February 2021

EFFECTIVE ON: 16 February 2021

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 15 February 2021

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERSONNEL BOARD
HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.30 PM TO 7.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), Carl Doran, Lindsay Ferris, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Clive Jones and Simon Weeks

Officers Present

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

28. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from John Kaiser.

29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 17 November 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at a future opportunity.

30. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of absence received.

31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

33. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

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

34. AGENCY WORKER USAGE - QUARTER 3

The Board received the Agency Worker Usage – Quarter 3 report.

RESOLVED: That the Agency Worker Usage – Quarter 3 report be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.55 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall and Wayne Smith

Officers Present

Judy Kelly, Highways Development Manager
Sean O'Connor, Head of Legal
Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Andrew Fletcher
Senjuti Manna
Kieran Neumann
Simon Taylor

51. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

52. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 December 2020, and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 16 December 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

Relating to a comment within the minutes, Gary Cowan queried whether a Committee Member should be present for the entirety of the consideration of an item. Sean O'Connor, Head of Legal, clarified that the Council's Constitution set out that Committee Members should be present for the entirety of an item, including all presentations, representations and discussions.

53. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Pauline Jorgensen made a comment relating to agenda item 55, on the grounds that she had been the Executive Member with responsibility for libraries 2 years ago. Pauline stated that she no longer had libraries within her Executive portfolio, and would come into this meeting with an open mind and listen to all presentations, representations and discussions prior to coming to a decision. Pauline added that she would therefore take part in both the discussion and the vote on this item.

Stephen Conway made a comment relating to agenda item 55, on the grounds that he had campaigned to secure a new library in Twyford and was therefore an advocate for the provision of one. Stephen added that his commitment to the provision of a new library in Twyford did not constitute either a personal or financial interest, and he would assess the application based on its planning merits. Stephen added that he would therefore take part in both the discussion and the vote on this item.

54. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

55. PATH CREATION ORDER AT JUBILEE AVENUE

Proposal: Path creation order

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council

The Committee received a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 29 to 106.

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

Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey commented that she hoped that officers would ensure that no Jubilee Oaks were damaged during the creation of this section of the path. Simon Weeks commented that the proposals included a no dig approach and the use of permeable materials.

Angus Ross queried what criteria the order could be challenged on, during the next consultation, should the order be made on the evening. Andrew Fletcher, case officer, stated that an interested party would have to make a new representation which showed a legal interest in the land.

Malcolm Richards queried what process would follow should someone claim a legal interest in the land. Andrew Fletcher stated that should the order be made, a 6 week period (which would be advertised) would follow to allow interested parties to come forward. After this period, and should no objections be received, there would be a further 6 month period for individuals to challenge the legal processes relating to the making of the order.

Pauline Jorgensen queried whether this path would include the Gear Change guidance relating to separation of pedestrians and cyclists. Andrew Fletcher stated that greenways are off-road routes and comply with the guidance in that respect, as the new guidance discourages shared footway/cycleways, but outside of this the Greenways were not usually designed to segregated users. Highways were aware of the new standards and would comply where possible. Pauline Jorgensen requested that the following be included within the minutes: When designing the route, officers endeavour to meet as many of the Gear Change objectives including the separation of cycle ways and footways given the constraints of the site.

Gary Cowan stated that the original consultation was thorough and well presented, and suggested that officers may wish to consider developing an action plan to address the points already raised within the initial consultation. Gary added that it would be useful to present a reference number alongside such orders to allow easy reference in the future.

The Committee were unanimous in their support for this scheme, as it provided a linked greenway route to allow for recreation and exercise.

RESOLVED That the order be made subject to the recommendations set out in agenda pages 29 to 30.

56. APPLICATION NO.201022 - OLD SCHOOL HALL, HIGH STREET, TWYFORD

Proposal: Full application for the proposed restoration and conversion of existing building into a library, erection of a single storey lobby/link area and a two storey extension to provide multi-purpose community facilities including a café, plus associated landscaping and demolition of existing public toilets (phased)

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

The Committee received a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 107 to 158.

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

Wayne Smith, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Wayne stated that it had been a long journey to get to this stage, and he hoped that the Committee would approve this application. Wayne wished to thank the case officer Simon Taylor, WBC officer Mark Redfearn, and David Turner from the Polehampton Trust for all of their help and support in getting the application to this stage.

John Halsall, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. John stated that he was delighted to support the application, which had been on a long but highly enjoyable journey. John wished to thank David Turner, James Fort, John Jarvis, Andrew Cardy and Wayne Smith for their help and support in the development of this project and application. John added that this project would be of no financial benefit to the Borough Council, but it would be a community asset for the village. John extended his thanks to both the Twyford Borough and Parish Councillors for their support.

Lindsay Ferris, Ward Member, spoke in support of the application. Lindsay wished to thank David Turner, who had been instrumental in ensuring that this project progressed forwards. Lindsay stated that he fully supported this application, as it was a much needed community facility for Twyford, whilst retaining and using a Grade 2 listed building. Lindsay queried whether some of the nearby car parking be designated solely for use of the library, and was the replacement of the toilets in phase two planned and included within this application.

Stephen Conway stated that he was pleased to see this application come forward, and pointed out that this application would renew a previous consent that was granted to the Polehampton Trust in 2016, with the new applicant being WBC. Stephen stated that the listed building had been used as a temporary library before, and had been given outline consent for a library in the past. Stephen added that the proposals would cause minor harm to the listed building, disruption of roosting bats, and the loss of a sycamore tree, however the community benefits of the proposals outweighed the negatives. Stephen stated that this had been a community aspiration for 20 years, and he could personally testify for the strong sense of community support for a new library in Twyford.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that the registered speakers' sentiments reflected the merits of this project and the people that made it happen. Andrew queried whether the existing toilet block was still in use, and whether an informative could be added asking that infrastructure be installed to allow the easy installation of additional electric vehicle charging points in the future. Simon Taylor, case officer, stated that the toilets were due to be refurbished during stage one and then demolished in stage two. Regarding the car parking, Simon stated that

this was situated outside of the red line boundary and therefore had to be dealt with separately.

Pauline Jorgensen queried what might happen to the old library site. Stephen Conway suggested that it may be a possibility that this site could be demolished to provide additional car parking, however this was outside of the scope of this application.

Gary Cowan queried why the Environment Agency were not in the list of consultees. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that the Environment Agency were not a statutory consultee for this application. Gary stated that he did not like the loss of the sycamore tree, however on balance the benefits of the scheme outweighed this.

Angus Ross queried whether informative 10, relating to listed building consent, was part of this planning application or a separate issue. Simon Taylor stated that the listed building consent had been separately submitted and would be determined alongside this application under delegated powers.

Chris Bowring stated that there would be some damage to the listed building, and suggested that listed building consent should possibly come to the Committee for future applications.

Carl Doran concurred with comments made by Simon Weeks, in that the Committee may have looked on this application differently if it was for a commercial or residential development, however the community benefits outweighed the harm in this instance.

The Committee gave their thanks to all those who enabled the development of the proposals and the project as a whole.

RESOLVED That application 201022 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 108 to 122.

57. APPLICATION NO.203439 - 36 AND 39-48 GROVELANDS PARK, WINNERSH, WOKINGHAM, RG41 5LD

Proposal: Full application for the proposed removal of 12 no. existing mobile homes and the erection of 11 no. two storey pre-fabricated temporary accommodation units consisting of one self-contained two- bedroom housing unit per floor (plots 39-48) and 1 no. single storey mobile house (plot 36).

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Housing Services

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 159 to 192.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Rewording of condition 13;
- Additional condition 18 to secure electric vehicle charging details;
- Receipt of consultation response from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, raising no objection;
- Reference to comments from Prue Bray, Ward Member.

Clinton Taylor, Winnersh Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. Clinton stated that the proposals were to replace existing one storey units with two storey units, which would be out of keeping with the area. Clinton added that the existing sewerage provision was inadequate to accommodate the proposed two storey units. Clinton stated that the Parish Council would welcome the old units to be replaced with suitable one storey units.

Simon Price, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Simon stated that this was an important improvement project to supply good quality emergency accommodation for families within the Borough. Simon stated that the construction timings for the project had been much reduced as part of this application. Simon stated that the two storey aspect of the application was a point of contention, however it allowed for additional accommodation for families in need of emergency housing. Simon concluded that the proposals would reduce the need for bed and breakfast use to house families in need of emergency housing.

Prue Bray, Ward Member, spoke in support of the application. Prue stated that there was a pressing need for temporary accommodation within the Borough, and the proposals included better quality accommodation than the existing poorly insulated units. Prue added that the two storey nature of the proposals were a concern, however she felt that these had been addressed within the officer report. Prue stated that the windows mostly faced away from existing units, and in instances where this was not the case the windows were obscure glazed. Prue concluded by stating that the sewerage concerns had been taken into account, and concerns regarding antisocial behaviour already existed prior to this application.

Paul Fishwick, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Paul stated that he did not object to the replacement of the existing one storey units with new one storey units, however there was inadequate screening to accommodate two storey units, which would be out of keeping with the character of the area. Paul was of the opinion that the proposals would be akin to a large and insensitive wall within the existing development. Paul stated that the sewerage system was already failing within the development, and the proposals would only make this issue worse.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey stated that she had no issue with the provision of new single storey units within the development. Rachelle added that the biggest issue with the proposals was the inadequate sewerage provision. The two storey nature of the units would lead to massing and overlooking, and would be out of keeping with the character of the area. Rachelle stated that the site consisted of single storey units, and it should be kept that way. Rachelle was of the opinion that the application should be refused.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that he was in favour of replacing the existing poor quality units. Andrew queried whether the total proposed parking spaces of 23 was greater than the existing provision, queried where units 39 to 43 would park their cars and whether they would share any spaces, queried how sewerage issues had been addressed, and whether there was any specific exemption for this type of accommodation relating to amenity space requirements. Senjuti Manna, case officer, stated that Highways had suggested only 16 car parking spaces would be required to meet standards, which would lead to a better layout of spaces. Units 39 to 43 were not included within the plans. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that although sewerage was outside of the scope of this application, several benefits relating to sewerage would be realised as part of this application. Relating to amenity requirements, Senjuti Manna stated

that a strict occupancy period of 12 months would be applied, as it was not the intention for this accommodation to be used by a family on a permanent basis.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that he was concerned that internal space requirements were not being met. Andrew queried whether any consultation had been worked on relating to whether the proposals could cause mental health issues for occupants, and queried where the fire assembly point would be located, and whether it would be compliant, given the density of the site. Simon Weeks stated that given the current option for emergency occupation could include stays in small bed and breakfast facilities for families, the proposals were likely to be improvements for the mental wellbeing of any occupants. Justin Turvey stated that the fire assembly point was not a planning consideration, however it was likely that the proposed units would follow the existing site plan.

Carl Doran stated that he totally accepted that the proposals would be an improvement over bed and breakfast accommodation, however he had concerns regarding outdoor amenity space provision given that many of the users of the proposed units would have young children. Carl sought clarification as to what constituted a modular design and passive fire protection. Senjuti Manna stated that the proposals included 'misterters', a more sophisticated form of sprinklers. Senjuti added that the walls were fire resistant which meant that the six meter separation gap was not necessary everywhere. Senjuti stated that there was a field to the south of the site, and whilst immediate outdoor amenity space was limited the accommodation would only be used on a temporary basis.

Abdul Loyes that he was supportive of the proposals, and stated that flooding issues had been addressed as he knew the area quite well.

Pauline Jorgensen queried where potential overlooking would occur, as it was not clear from the plans. Senjuti Manna stated that there had been concerns that the landing area of the external staircase could be used as an external balcony. Senjuti added that to minimise overlooking, a condition is used to secure privacy screening for the external staircase landing so that even if these were used as external balconies, no overlooking would occur.

Malcolm Richards queried whether the units would have flat roofs, queried whether the outside areas would be illuminated, and queried whether any of the proposed spaces would be for disabled use. Senjuti Manna confirmed that the roofs of the units would be flat. Senjuti added that the roads had existing street lamps, and each unit would have a small motion detected external light. Senjuti stated that the parking spaces had been changed from 23 to 16, and the detailed parking plan would be approved prior to the occupation of the units.

Malcolm Richards queried whether there was a communal depot for waste on the site. Senjuti Manna confirmed that each unit had a bin storage and drying yard at the rear of each plot.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that the motion sensor lights could become a nuisance, and felt that the proposals were better than the existing provision. Gary was of the opinion that the proposals were of a dreadful appearance, would not fit into their surroundings, and would let people down and could create more issues going forwards. Gary stated that he had an open mind regarding whether to approve this application.

Gary Cowan queried why the Environment Agency had not been consulted on this application. Senjuti Manna clarified that most of the site was in flood zone one, and therefore the Environment Agency did not need to be consulted unless there was a critical drainage issue. In addition, a flood risk assessment had been submitted and agreed.

Stephen Conway stated that this was a difficult application to determine, as there was a great need for more temporary accommodation within the Borough to help people, however this needed to be balanced against the impact on existing residents. Stephen was of the opinion that the proposals were out of keeping with the existing character of the area, however the need for the units may outweigh the negatives, although there was a duty to protect the existing visual amenity for residents such as through screening.

Chris Bowring queried whether the proposed units could be considered as mobile homes, and queried whether a temporary approval could be granted to assess whether screening and other mitigation was acceptable. Senjuti Manna stated that as the proposed units were two storeys in height, they could not be mobile homes by definition. Senjuti added that they were classified as two storey pre-fabricated units, and would require a change of use from mobile homes to residential, which had been assessed as not causing harm to the area. Regarding the temporary approval query, Simon Price commented that the scheme had been based on double stacking units to take advantage of economies of scale and value for money. As it was in effect a permanent structure, Simon was of the opinion that a temporary grant of planning permission would not be suitable. Chris Bowring stated that subject to the provision of adequate screening, he would be inclined to approve the application on balance.

Simon Weeks queried the space requirement relationship between caravans and permanent accommodation. Senjuti Manna stated that there was a requirement for a 6m side to side separation between caravans. For C3 usage, a 12m front to side distance was set out within the guidelines. The proposals fell slightly short of the 12m distance, however the units would only be used on a temporary basis and the boundaries would be screened via high hedging.

Stephen Conway queried whether the proposed screening was enough to break up the proposed bulk and massing. Senjuti Manna confirmed that the landscaping officer was happy with the proposals.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey raised concern that this could encourage other units on the site to apply for two storey permission. In addition, Rachelle was of the opinion that the proposals were out of keeping with the character of the area, and would change the character of the area.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey proposed that the application be refused, on the grounds that it was out of keeping with the character of the local area and would constitute to a loss of amenity for existing residents. This was seconded by Gary Cowan and upon being put to the vote the motion fell.

Stephen Conway proposed an additional informative to encourage the applicant to provide additional landscaping in order to achieve greater screening. This proposal was carried by the Committee and added to the list of informatives.

RESOLVED That application number 203439 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 160 to 167, reworded condition 13 and additional

condition 18 as set out in the Members' Update, and additional informative relating to additional landscaping as resolved by the Committee.

58. APPLICATION NO.202106 - PADDICKS PATCH, WAINGLES ROAD, CHARVIL, RG10 0UA

Proposal: Full Planning application for the proposed erection of new meeting hall following demolition of existing meeting hall, relocation of three metal storage containers, plus car park improvements with the installation of a cycle stand.

Applicant: Mr Donald MacDonald, Loddon District Scouts

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 193 to 216.

The Committee were advised that the Members' Update included:

- Amended condition 6;
- Updated summary information related to agenda page 201.

Gary Cowan queried why pictures of the site were not included within the agenda documentation, and asked that this be improved in the future. Gary stated that around 17 trees were due to be removed on the site. Gary added that 57 trees were due to be planted on site, although if they were juvenile specimens then they would not be adequate. Gary was of the opinion that tree replacement proposals should be adequate for each specific planning application, and not draw on trees planted in other areas.

Pauline Jorgensen queried how the landscaping would be managed against the road. Senjuti Manna, case officer, stated that she could confirm specific details with the landscape officer, however the trees along the roads were being retained, however it was not clear on the plan.

Stephen Conway stated that subject to the provision of adequate screening and sufficient tree planting, he would support this application.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried what percentage of biodiversity net gain would be achieved as part of this application, and queried whether two informatives might be added, asking for increased secure cycle storage and suggesting that the applicant explores opportunities to secure funding for solar panel provision. Simon Weeks stated that as a heavily wooded site, solar panels may not be effective, however there would be no harm with wither informative being added. Senjuti Manna stated that there was a standard DEFRA method used to calculate biodiversity net gain, and once the applicant came forward with a discharge of conditions application the Council's ecology officer would give their input.

Malcolm Richards sought clarification regarding SUDs on the site. Senjuti Manna stated that the site had existing cess pits, which was not currently connected to the Thames Water system, however the proposed building would be connected to the system. The Council's drainage officer had requested further details regarding SUDs and how the property would connect to the Thames Water system.

Carl Doran commented that there was a good replacement rate of trees on the site, however the replacement trees would be juvenile and therefore smaller. Simon Weeks

commented that the trees due to be removed were of wither C or U categorisation, meaning they were, in general, trees of poor quality or health.

Andrew Mickleburgh proposed that two informatives be added, the first of which suggesting that the applicant provide additional on-site secure cycle storage, and the second suggesting that the applicant explores opportunities to secure funding for solar panel provision. These informatives were agreed by the Committee and added to the list of informatives.

RESOLVED That application number 202106 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 194 to 200, amended condition 6 as set out in the Members' Update, and additional informatives relating to secure cycle storage and solar panels as resolved by the Committee.

59. APPLICATION NO.203344 - HIGHWOOD BUNGALOW, FAIRWATER DRIVE, WOODLEY, RG5 3JE

Proposal: Full application for a change of use from residential dwelling (Class C3(b)) to Residential institution/nursing home (C2), including a single storey side extension following demolition of the existing carport.

Applicant: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 217 to 234.

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

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that the agenda documentation could be improved, including the addition of additional pictures of the existing site. Gary queried how many vulnerable adults would be on the site and what their ages would be, and queried what the car parking facilities were on the site. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that the age of the occupants was not a planning consideration. Kieran Neumann, case officers, stated that there would be two parking spaces. Gary Cowan wished for the applicant to take note of the proximity of the site to a school.

A number of Members commented that this application was a community asset and would benefit some of the most vulnerable residents in the Borough.

RESOLVED That application number 203344 be approved, subject to conditions and informative as set out in agenda pages 218 to 219.

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Decision made in the presence of:
Ian Church, Senior Specialist - Growth & Delivery
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION RECORD SHEET IMD 2021/07
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Title of the report	West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan Proposed Submission November 2020
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DECISION MADE BY Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith
ACTION BY Director, Place and Growth - Chris Trill
DECISION MADE ON 16 February 2021

Recommendation contained in the report

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agrees that Wokingham Borough Council:

1. Submit the comments contained in this report as this Council's response to West Berkshire District Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan Proposed Submission consultation (November 2020);
2. Notes the withdrawal of the holding objection set out in the council's response to the earlier consultation; and
3. Delegates any further submissions to the examination in public process to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning and Enforcement.

Decision

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agreed that Wokingham Borough Council:

1. Submit the comments contained in the report as this Council's response to West Berkshire District Council's Minerals and Waste Local Plan Proposed Submission consultation (November 2020);
2. Noted the withdrawal of the holding objection set out in the council's response to the earlier consultation; and
3. Delegated any further submissions to the examination in public process to the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning and Enforcement.

Reasons for Decision if different to recommendation

N/A

Alternative options considered and rejected at time of the decision

N/A

Summary of consultations undertaken

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Resources and Assets	No comments received
Monitoring Officer	No comments received
Leader of the Council	No comments received

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

N/A

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

None

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

None

Background papers

Report & recommended response

PUBLISHED ON: 16 February 2021

EFFECTIVE ON: 24 February 2021

CALL-IN PERIOD EXPIRES: 23 February 2021

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 18 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 6.30 PM TO 7.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Burgess
Gary Cowan

83. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stuart Munro.

84. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 28 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Leader of Council at a later date.

85. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Optalis Holdings Ltd.

Councillor UllaKarin Clark declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that she was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes Ltd.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was a Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Ltd and Optalis Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Items 83, 84, 85 and 86 by virtue of the fact that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillors Clark, Halsall, Kaiser and Smith took part in all discussions and voted on all the items.

86. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER

The budget meetings of the Council are where the administration sets out the future. However, we must acknowledge a year which has been extraordinary.

Deaths within the UK for those who have been diagnosed with Covid within 28 days have risen to close to 120,000; a huge rise since we last met.

Please join me in a moment's silence for those who have died during this dreadful pandemic in Wokingham, the UK, and around the world, and those who have suffered not just the effect of the virus itself, but the problems which have accompanied it.

Our lives have changed, unrecognisably for some, and many lives have been so sadly lost. I can only reinforce my condolences for those that have suffered so much.

The weekly rate to 13th February is 76.6 today, which is well below the peak of 606 on the 4th January, but still compares very badly to the below five in August. Sadly, deaths and hospitalisations will continue high for some time but seem to have stopped rising.

Our GPs have been magnificent and have now vaccinated the over 70s (including me), residents in care homes for older adults and their carers, frontline health, social care workers and clinically vulnerable individuals. The next cohort is now being vaccinated. So light is genuinely at the end of the tunnel.

I would like a big thank again to all the carers, doctors, health staff, social care staff, health, police, fire, rescue, ambulance, teachers, school staff, charities, volunteers and our staff. In short everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue during these appalling times. It has never been more vital that we play our role.

Many of our critical proactive measures 'going over and above' would not have been possible if we did not have a stable and strong financial foundation on which to fund our numerous measures intended to assist our community.

Covid has had a profound impact on the Council's budgets. We had new responsibilities that needed funding, we lost vital income sources such as car parking and leisure, and we had to put on hold cost reduction programmes in order that our staff focus on the important job in hand, responding to the pandemic. Despite all of this we had the financial resources to go well above the bare minimum and provide so much more for our community, examples of which I have previously conveyed. It is this that illustrates the true strength of our financial management, as recognised by numerous external assessments, and not the misleading and irresponsible claims you hear.

Our response in many ways has been astonishing. We have:

- Utilised the Council's existing emergency planning processes to enact a coordinated, managed, and timely response to the crisis;
- Sought to protect residents in care homes by taking action locally;
- Supported care homes by supplying PPP, critical advice, staff resources where needed;
- Resisted national policy to discharge from hospital to care homes unless testing and controls were in place and I expected to find myself in the jug but I wasn't;
- Reduced homelessness to a single rough sleeper;
- Introduced lateral flow testing, initiated to enable our residents to meet their loved ones in care homes which we had to abort during lockdown;
- Set up a Community Hub with voluntary sector partners to protect and ensure the vulnerable could receive the support they needed;
- Created the concept of the one-front door (in the CAB) to service all our residents, either by the Council or the voluntary sector
- Provided extended care support for vulnerable children recognising that usual family support arrangement was not possible during lockdown;
- Worked closely with GPs and the health sector to enable vaccinations to be rolled out as speedily as possible;
- Maintained critical services for the most vulnerable residents, including children, young people and the wider community;
- Maintained universal services such as waste, recycling, and highways;

- Provided financial support to local businesses and the economy;
- Redeployed staff to those services and activities of greatest need. In the first lockdown we had 107 staff redeployed;
- Maintained local democracy through “virtual” council meetings, accessible by the public;
- Communicated regularly and clearly with residents, businesses, partners, elected Members and staff;
- Considered the impacts on particular parts of the community e.g. ethnic minority groups, vulnerable residents and young people;
- Identified opportunities to positively impact the Council’s Climate Emergency Plan;
- Identified and monitored the financial impacts of Covid;
- Used the risk-based approach to decision-making;
- Planned ahead for the “Restart” and “Recovery” phases of the emergency. It has never been of such profound importance that local government plays its role for the local community;
- Took every opportunity to advance the highways programme.

These are some of the essential measures employed during the pandemic; they have touched every resident and enterprise.

With a steady hand, we are navigating through the emergency to recovery, changing the way we work, supporting all our residents, and ensuring that services run as normally as possible.

This Council will not be found wanting to support residents be it child hunger, poverty, or homelessness. We recognise that many of our critical proactive measures 'going over and above' would not have been possible if we had not had a stable and strong financial foundation on which to fund our numerous measures.

The budget proposals before you tonight are therefore set in this context, one of continual uncertainty and challenge, but one that sets out our stall for a strong recovery.

87. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

87.1 Philip Meadowcroft had asked the Leader of the Council the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Finance and Housing:

Question

At the last Executive meeting on January 28, you claimed it was an honest mistake that the composition of the Standards Committee was not compliant with the WBC Constitution. As Leader of the Council, you took responsibility since the buck stopped with you on this matter. But, you did not accept when I put it to you that it was symptomatic of a wider disregard of Constitutional rules.

I watched the Audit Committee on February 1, during which Members realised that the Constitution had been flouted because the numbers in the Treasury Management Report, which the Audit Committee had agreed in November 2020, and then forwarded to the

Executive were replaced by new and materially different numbers whilst the approved November numbers were relegated to an appendix.

Were the changes which amended the Audit Committee's approved, as received, Treasury Management Report caused either by another honest mistake (as you admitted regarding the Standards Committee issue) or is this further evidence which suggests that compliance with the Constitution takes second place to the political convenience of the ruling group?

Answer

Councillor Halsall has already explained to you that there was no Constitutional breach with regards to the composition of the Standards Committee and why this was so.

The other part of your question, this is why the reason I am answering it is because I also attended the meeting and it is same posed by the two Liberal Democrat members at the meeting, and as you watched the meeting you would have heard the Officers reply to those allegations.

You have, like the Liberal Democrats at that meeting, suggested that the report considered by the Audit Committee, at the meeting of 23rd November was changed before being presented to the Executive on 28th January. I can categorically confirm this was not the case.

The report reviewed by the Audit Committee was presented to the Executive fully and unabridged as required in the Constitution. Audit Committee is required to review progress against Treasury Management indicators (which they did on this case) and note further information in the report.

At the Executive on 28th January it was asked (and did):

*"note Appendix A, which was **the Treasury Management Mid-Year report** which was agreed at the Audit Committee on 23rd November 2020".*

This stated quite clearly in the covering report recommendations, and furthermore is covered in more detail at the second paragraph of the executive summary to the Executive report.

Therefore, the report the Audit Committee debated and agreed democratically is the one being presented to the Council and does not need to be presented back to the Audit Committee.

However, in passing the report. noted by the Audit Committee to the Executive, our statutory Chief Financial Officer thought it would be helpful for the Executive and the public to be aware of the broader impact of the treasury management activities by including the income generated by our commercial activities funded by the borrowing. This information was conveyed by way of a covering report and I would consider it to be extremely helpful, particularly given the recent media debate around the cost of the Council 's debt to the local taxpayer. So, the Treasury Mid-Term report presented at the Audit Committee was not changed, the Audit Committee discharged their responsibility under the Constitution and the Chief Financial Officer, who is required to provide a covering report in the passing of the Mid-Year report on to the Executive. So there is no Constitutional breach here whatsoever.

What I do find alarming however is there is a real issue here, it is not the alleged breach in the Constitution but the fact that our finances, our borrowings, and our financial returns from our borrowings are in an incredibly healthy state, and that is despite the impact of Covid-19. There are those making alarmist claims that our borrowing is reckless, even to the extent of costing households £10,000. This is of course absolute nonsense and merely irresponsible politics. You can see clearly from the public report produced by our statutory Chief Financial Officer the impact of all our borrowing activities for schools, roads, care homes, housing and everything else comes at a credit to each household at each year. Let me say again, we get our roads, schools and other essential assets for our community at no cost to the Council Taxpayer, in fact they receive a credit. This is achieved because the income from our commercial and investment activities not only funds but exceeds all of the Council's borrowing costs.

This is a remarkable achievement and should be applauded. We should both be assured and delighted about yet another indicator of the strong financial management, which is vital to us being able to meet the needs of our community, particularly during Covid-19. But incredulously this isn't the issue being talked about and this isn't what questions are being asked about, I wonder why? Do you think that it is our Opposition finds it galling that we are holding up so well during this pandemic and we aren't plummeting into any form of financial crisis? This is so wrong and makes no sense to me, petty politics to detract from the fundamental issues. We are strong, ready and capable of being able to continue to step up and meet the needs of our community in delivering the services at the high level that we do.

Supplementary Question

Thank you, Councillor Kaiser for answering my question. My supplementary is directed to you, Councillor Halsall. The criticisms voiced by the Audit Committee I think result from the continuing determination of the ruling group to bulldoze through their needs irrespective of the Constitution. Firstly, it was the Standards Committee and now it is the Audit Committee. Both issues show for me that you have not stuck to the rules like you instruct residents to do so on those Covid signs on lampposts through the Borough. You have undermined the respect, Councillor Halsall, and authority required of your leadership and the compelling need for the affairs of this Council to be seen and conducted in a transparent and lawful manner. The only way forward, Councillor Halsall, since you fulsomely assured at the last Council meeting that you are democrat and that the buck stops with you is for you to stand down. It would be the first step in putting things right. Will you please do that?

Supplementary Answer from Councillor Halsall

Thank you Philip, your opinion.

87.2 Ian Shenton asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Question

I am very pleased to see that trees have gained a line in the budget, with Tree Inspections being allocated £80,000 for each of the next three years. Trees perform an enormously valuable service by sequestering carbon, filtering particulate matter, stabilising ground water levels to alleviate flood risk, and fostering biodiversity whether alive or dead. Indeed, there have been several attempts to place a monetary value on their service, and while it depends on variables such as maturity and location, a tree's value ranges from a few hundred to several thousand pounds in cost avoidance. As you estimate that the Council is

responsible for around 100,000 trees, would you not agree that, given the value of their service, 80p per tree is hopelessly inadequate?

Answer

Thank you for your very good question and I could not agree with you more for your very valid comments about the very important role that trees perform in protecting our environment.

The budget to support trees in the Borough is not limited to the item proposed through the Medium Term Financial Plan over the next three years that you referred to. Incidentally, this allocation of £80,000 is to fund a further two members of staff to enable the Council to fulfil its duty to inspect all of the trees on its own land in the interests of public safety; and as you can well imagine to protect the public we must do that. This is in line with an updated Tree Inspection Policy which will be considered under the Executive Member Decision, that is myself, on 31st March 2021. Works to trees identified through this inspection regime are undertaken and covered by other budgets.

Trees are an important focus of the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan. In addition to the Tree Inspection Team, the Council employs a number of specialist Tree and Landscape Officers to ensure that important and healthy trees are protected from development. In line with the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, the Council is preparing a Tree Strategy and a plan to deliver a further 250,000 trees in the Borough. Mr Shenton, I am sure you will very, very, readily agree with that fantastic initiative to satisfy the carbon neutral initiative that we wish to obtain by 2030.

Supplementary Question

I remain slightly concerned that the area is being under resourced because our native deciduous hardwoods are now facing serious threats from an increasing range of pests and diseases. For example, given that ash dieback is likely to disseminate our ash tree population what percentage of the Council's tree cover is under threat and where is the budget to replace those soon to be lost trees?

Supplementary Answer

Like I said we pay due attention to all the trees within the Borough whether they are owned by Wokingham Borough Council or whether they are privately owned as well. We do all our best to protect those trees from any pesticides or any other insects or whatever that might attack them and we work with the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association which is a very active organisation and we work with that organisation to protect our trees.

88. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

88.1 Gary Cowan had asked the Leader of the Council the following question but as he was not in the meeting when the question was asked the following written response was provided:

Question

If as the letter from the Council to all Members indicates that Council can make changes the restriction on Executive membership and the Leader on the Standards Committee is not a legal requirement but is a local choice adopted by full Council. The letter continued to add that the decision to appoint the Subcommittee in that form and with that

membership was decided by a simple majority of the members present and voting (as required by section 39 of Schedule 12). Any decisions the Committee made subsequently are made with the Council's authority, are lawful and are binding.

My question is why bother to have a Constitution when if it's the law the Council must abide by it but if it's not Council can just change it as recent events has shown?

Answer

I too have many questions on how Local Government works, but sadly it is not a matter for here, it is a matter for Westminster.

You have been a Councillor for a lot longer than I and are aware that modifications are made to the Constitution on a continuous basis by full Council; so, the question is a little disingenuous.

The modifications are required by statute, or by a request of Councillors or Officers through the Constitution Review Working Group.

Any change is always in the full light of a full Council meeting and can be contested publicly by any Member.

The case to which you are referring would not have occurred if any Member had queried the appointments, but for twenty-one months it was unchallenged. Once challenged, I acted immediately to ensure that the Constitution was not anomalous, even though the advice was that it was not strictly necessary.

As you are aware, it was an honest mistake for which I have already apologised to Council.

88.2 Rachel Burgess asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

There have been numerous resident concerns raised regarding London Road in Wokingham since the new cycle lanes have been introduced. These have included the safety of the new cycle lanes, the safety of, and lack of compliance with, the 'no right turn' at Whitlock Avenue, concerns about three other junctions on this road (William Heelas Way, Froghall Lane and Priest Avenue) and the lack of pedestrian crossing along a long stretch of London Road where numerous families need to cross on the school run.

Residents have raised these issues out of a sense of community safety as well as the desire to support walking and cycling, and they are right to expect the Council to address their concerns. However they have not received a satisfactory answer for months and feel ignored. What is being done to address these concerns?

Answer

The London Road Cycleway scheme, which I think is actually a very nice new cycleway and uses recycled kerbs amongst other things. Like all highway projects it goes through a rigorous process of Road Safety Audits (RSA) at various stages in its design and construction. A stage 1 Road Safety Audit was carried out at feasibility, a stage 2 Road Safety Audit was carried out at the detailed design stage and more recently a stage 3 Road Safety Audit was carried out now that the scheme is operational. The scheme we

have delivered has been in line with all of the recommendations of the stage 1 and stage 2 RSA and the project designers are currently considering the relatively minor recommendations from the stage 3 RSA which we will implement.

It is because of the rigorous safety audit process which is carried out by independent qualified road safety experts that the Council is able to reassure residents that there are no immediate safety concerns with regard to the junctions of William Heelas Way, Whitlock Avenue, Froghall Lane, Priest Avenue and London Road. Whilst this has already been communicated to some residents, the Council remains willing to engage with anybody in the local community who has any lingering doubts, and I would be happy to answer any further questions.

With regard to the specific issue of non-compliance with the no right turn restrictions joining London Road from Whitlock Avenue Officers have met with representatives of the local community on site to discuss what additional measures might be possible to improve compliance. Unfortunately, when people drive dangerously it is quite difficult to do something about that sometimes, apart from putting a policeman there. The meeting concluded that it was not possible to have any additional physical barriers to a right turn without causing significant problems to people turning right into Whitlock Avenue. If you put a barrier across to stop a right turn you also then would not be able to turn into there and if you put some restriction in the middle of the road to stop people bearing right at the end it would mean that cyclists and pedestrians would not be able to cross safely, so we have got a bit of a problem there. We are considering whether additional signage would be appropriate to help drivers to recognise there is no right turn restriction and to obey the Highway Code. That is the fundamental thing people are driving dangerously and really they should be obeying the Highway Code and not doing that.

On the issue of sufficient pedestrian crossing facilities on London Road, it is worth noting that this project has only resulted in the removal of one pedestrian island. There are formal crossing facilities at regular intervals which serve the vast majority of families wishing to cross London Road. In fact I looked at it just before the meeting and on 1.5 miles of road there are actually five pedestrian crossings, which is probably an unusually high number. There are, however, a handful of properties that now have a longer walk to a crossing compared to the previous layout, and I do recognise that.

You may be aware that there is new cycle design guidance from the DfT in Local Transport Note, LTN 1/20. The new guidance was too late for us to incorporate in the design of this project and the Council will be making use of the guidance for new projects and we are looking forward to adopting it shortly.

Supplementary Question

With respect to the Safety Audits you are right that residents do know that they have been carried out but they do not feel that that is addressing their specific concerns. You know they are aware that has been done and the sort of process that has been followed but it is not addressing some of their specific concerns. I think we are all being encouraged to walk and cycle, quite rightly, but we should expect safe and convenient routes to do that. As you know this is a busy 'A' road and lots of people will be trying to cross it and I think if the residents are actually concluding that it is safer for them to drive rather than walk to school then something as gone wrong there.

I appreciate your answer and thank you for that and of what has been looked at. Would you agree to visit the site with me and to meet residents just to explain what has been looked at and sort of understand their concerns directly?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, that is exactly what I was about to suggest. Maybe between us we can help explain things to them a bit more clearly and help them understand what the facilities are, what we are planning, and what the audits have done. So yes I would be happy to meet.

89. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2021/22

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2021/22.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing explained that the Housing Revenue Account was a ringed fenced fund and reminded the meeting that previously the Council had decided, because it was felt that the Council was better placed to administer and maintain these properties, that it would retain its social housing rather than pass them over to a registered provider.

Councillor Kaiser also reported that during the last year, whilst in the middle of the Covid pandemic, the Council had managed to carry out all major repairs that were required to these properties and the vast majority of the repairs that had been scheduled for the year.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2021/22 (Appendix A);
- 2) that Council house dwelling rents be increased by up to 1.50% effective from April 2021 in line with the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2015;
- 3) Garage rents to be increased by 1.16% effective from April 2021 in line with Council's general fees and charges;
- 4) Shared Equity Rents to be increased by 1.13% based on September RPI, effective from April 2021;
- 5) Tenant Service Charges to be set based on cost recovery;
- 6) the Housing Major Repairs (capital) programme for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix B;
- 7) Sheltered room guest charges for 2021/22 remain unchanged at £9.50 per night per room.

90. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed Capital Programme and Strategy for 2021-2024 which included the capital investment that would be made during this period and how this would be funded.

Members noted the scale of the Capital programme for 2021-2024, which amounted to £445.5m, and how this was due to be funded, which included approx. £11m from Council resources.

Councillor Jorgensen stated that she was very excited to see the investment in roads and transport, particularly sustainable transport, all of which she felt would help residents.

Councillor Murray was also pleased with the amount of money that was being set aside for climate emergency projects in the budget and the impact that could have on the Council's carbon footprint across the Borough. He was particularly pleased that the Council was managing to fund all of the projects set out in the Capital Programme at what was such a difficult time.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to agree the following:

- 1) the Capital Strategy for 2021 - 2024 - Appendix A;
- 2) the three-year Capital Programme for 2021 - 2024 – Appendix B;
- 3) the draft vision for capital investment over the next five years - Appendix C;
- 4) the use of developer contribution funding (s106 and CIL) for capital projects as set out in Appendix D. Approval is sought up to the project budget.

91. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2021-2024.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A, including the following additional appendices;
 - Prudential Indicators (Appendix B)
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2021/22 (Appendix C)
 - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D)
- 2) note that Audit Committee agreed the Treasury Management Strategy on 3 February 2021;
- 3) note the cumulative financial impact on the Council of its borrowing activities equates to a net credit to the general fund for the taxpayer of £13.64 per band D equivalent at end of 2021/22 and noting this credit increases to £62.86 at the end of 2023/24.

92. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021-2024 - REVENUE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2021/22

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021-2024, including the proposed revenue budget submission for 2021/22.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing advised that the Medium Term Financial Plan set out the Council's revenue budget submission for 2021-22 and highlighted that the budget would pay for all the services and all the costs that the Council expected to incur over the next 12 months.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) Council be recommended to approve the Summary of Budget Movements (SOBM) (as set out in Appendix A to the report);
- 2) the report of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, relating to Scrutiny of the Budget Setting Process 2021-22 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021-2024 (as set out in Appendix B to the report), be noted.

93. BUILDING CONTROL CHARGES

The Executive considered a report setting out proposed charges for the Building Control Shared Service, between Wokingham, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire Councils, to take effect on 1 April 2021.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised that the current schedule of charges had been agreed in May 2020. There was a need to ensure that the service was offered to all local authorities on a true cost recovery basis. It was therefore essential that the service kept charges as low as possible to remain competitive, but at the same time ensuring that sufficient income was generated. This was particularly important so that sufficiently competitive salaries could be offered to recruit and retain staff to provide the high-quality service that residents deserved.

Councillor Batth highlighted Appendix A, which showed the comparison between existing charges and the respective proposed charges which were being increased by 1.6% in line with the CPI index.

RESOLVED: That the setting of the Building Control Charges from 1 April 2021, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed.

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.15 PM TO 10.08 PM

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Parry Batth, Gary Cowan and Charlotte Haitham Taylor

Officers Present

Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist), Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure), Anne Hunter (Lead Specialist - Democratic and Electoral Services), Andrew Moulton (Assistant Director - Governance) and Grant Thornton (Senior Specialist Economic Prosperity & Place)

Others Present

72. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Emma Hobbs.

73. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

A declaration of interest was submitted from Shirley Boyt in relation to agenda item 77, on the grounds that she was a Member of the Working Group that worked on this strategy. Shirley stated that she would take no part in the discussions or voting for this item.

74. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

75. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

75.1 Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following question:

Question

The agenda states that and I quote "During the financial year 2020/21, the Flooding and Drainage team made further progress in fulfilling Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) statutory obligations as Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) under the Flood and Water Management Act (FWMA) 2010. The primary responsibility as an LLFA is to manage the coordination of surface water and groundwater flood risk in order to protect residents from flooding"

My question is does surface and Ground water risk include reservoirs and Dams or Not or is that a different water that residents do not need protecting from?

Answer

The Lead Local Flood Authority is responsible for coordinating the response to surface water and groundwater flood risk. The Environment Agency is responsible for overseeing the management of reservoir flooding and for the management and implementation of reservoir safety regulations in England. They are also responsible for coordinating the management of fluvial (river) flooding. In regards to reservoirs and specifically dams etcetera as well, that actually comes under a separate act of parliament – the Reservoirs Act 1075, in which reservoirs, with you being in Arborfield the principle reservoir that you are probably asking about would be the ones in Bearwood Lakes, which are covered under that act. Essentially, it is the responsibility of the land owner to conduct a 10 year structural risk assessment under the Reservoirs Act, and then coordinate with the Local Authority as to any planning that needs to be done in order to mitigate any risk. I think that Bearwood is coming up in 2024 or 2025, and the reason why I know this is whilst I was on Earley Town Council we did research into the Maiden Erlegh Reservoir Lake, and that report was done a few years back.

Supplementary Question

You have studied the subject very well, well done. The problem I've got with it is, and I agree with pretty much everything that you say, is that although the Environment Agency might have dam responsibilities, we have a responsibility to our residents. The Council has granted planning permission to build 18 houses directly under the flood burst zone, and so there has to be a link between the Council having responsibility in planning terms and the local flood risk as the local flood authority. The question is although the Council never informed the Environment Agency of this planning application, there is a very grey area where planning applications turn up, so how does our planning and flood risk fit in with this broad principle? I don't expect an answer now as it is fairly comprehensive.

Supplementary Answer

Indeed Gary, I may need to look to Francesca to take a stab at this. I agree with Gary that this is a grey area, and what makes it 'greyer' is that the ownership of the lakes has transferred as I believe that Reading Football Club now owns it.

The planning application, the Environment Agency were consulted on and we would expect them to comment on fluvial and reservoir flooding. So they were consulted on the planning application and if they had any concerns about reservoir flooding they would have commented as such. But, the Environment Agency, as Guy has already said, is responsible for reservoir safety regulations and so they are responsible for making sure that the reservoir owners or regulators are ensuring that they have done all of the works necessary to make sure that they are safe so that they won't breach and then cause flooding. The main point is that it really is a responsibility for the Environment Agency, and in relation to that planning application the Environment Agency were consulted.

At this point, some further discussions were had about this topic.

76. FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 5 to 10, which gave an update on flood risk management within the Borough.

The report outlined 11 key areas whereby actions had been undertaken in the past twelve months. These actions included the completion of Surface Water Management Plan for Earley, emergency response to flooding and subsequent S19 incident reports, delivery of capital drainage schemes, and smart drainage trials.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure) and Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- The asset register was critical both for proposed developments and retrospective, as a lot of detail could be hidden in areas such as slight dips in the ground.
- The NFM feature in Maiden Erlegh was brilliant and fundamental piece of work. There had been internal flooding further down that section of ditch towards the river. Was the modelling for the aforementioned feature inclusive of the reach down towards the river? Officer response – Officers were concerned that the culvert at Egremont Drive was acting as a bottleneck, meaning that although it was causing flooding at that location it could lead to other problems downstream should it be removed. Whilst the consultant was carrying out these works, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) ensured that they included all of that information in the modelling to ensure that the removal of the culvert would not have any adverse impact downstream. The contractor monitors this site on a weekly basis, compared to a monthly check for other locations within the Borough. In addition, the contractor would proactively check the site in the event of heavy rain.
- What support was in place for residents whose homes flooded? Officer response – WBC was working to set up dedicated support groups, in addition to working with flood action volunteers. WBC was aiming to be as proactive as possible in setting up flood resilience groups, with the Swallowfield flood resilience group being an excellent example. These measures were key, as flooding had a longer psychological impact on affected persons.
- In planning terms, some developments did not get built in the order they were envisaged. How was this managed to avoid a situation where an asset was not exactly where it should be? Officer response – The team had expanded over the years from two officers to six officers. This gave additional capacity to monitor these sort of situations. Lots of residents reported such instances, and officers were sent out to investigate.
- Could the programme of when each area would receive a surface water management plan be detailed, in addition to how each area was prioritised? Officer response – In terms of priorities, historical reports of flooding were used alongside the surface water flood risk maps and reports from residents. Currently, 1 surface water management plan was being developed per year, and this was based on a set amount of funding from Central Government. However, works were still carried out in other areas, for example this year a surface water flood risk management plan had been carried out in Earley in addition to a lot of capital works being carried out in other Borough locations.
- The A329, specifically the roundabout section in Winnersh, had been flooded in February 2020. Was there a reason why this particular location had not been included within the investigations? Officer response – When the river backed up the gulleys and drainage system at the roundabout, flooding occurred. Therefore, investigation was not required as the issue was known. Officers wanted to deliver a scheme to prevent

this issue from occurring, and were awaiting funding and liaison with stakeholders to do so.

- Officers and contractors should be thanked for undertaking works to install all CCTV and drainage works and surveys across the Borough, during a year with lower road usage. There had been a noticeable decrease in flooding in a number of usual problem locations.
- There had been instances of some gulleys not being emptied for some time in some locations. Officers were aware and were meeting with the relevant Members.
- Could a couple of examples be provided regarding partnership working, and how it reduced flooding? Officer response – A particular focus was using SUDs to reduce flood risk, to move towards sustainable drainage systems in above ground locations, as these had additional benefits such as amenity value.
- Would the Section 21 asset register include dams such as Bearwood Lakes, which would therefore be included within the Borough's emergency plan? Officer response – None of the dams were formally recorded within the asset register, as they were recorded through the Reservoir Act via the Environment Agency.
- When this item came to Committee in 2019, concerns were raised over residents paving over their front garden to convert it into additional parking when planning to extend their properties. At the time, a sub strategy had been agreed, however instances were still occurring commonly. What was being done to address this issue? Officer response – On a small scale this did not cause a significant impact, however, if this was happening frequently then the cumulative impact resulted in a large area where water would now run off and create surface water flood risk. Where possible, an informative was added to planning applications asking that green space be retained where possible. In some instances, planning permission was not required for some work. Officers were looking at the possibility of a Berkshire wide policy, or a joint communications strategy.
- Had ground water levels now risen after a period of lower than average rainfall? Officer response – A few years ago there were concerns as the ground water levels were low. Over the past couple of years there had been increased rainfall, leading to relatively stable water levels. This was subject to the changing weather.
- Thames Water had been brilliant regarding their communications on ongoing works. It was noted that making a note of their reference number, and always referring to that number allowed all works to be noted down in one central place.
- There had been an issue of flooding for several years in the area of Sandford Lane in Woodley, when would this issue be addressed? Officer response – Sandford Lane flooded on a regular basis as it crossed two sections of river, causing fluvial flooding. One solution to this involved raising the road out of the flood plain, compensating for the material being used to raise it out of the flood plain immediately next to the flood plain, where there was no suitable location to do so given the amounts of materials involved. A much wider natural flood risk management scheme was planned, which would hopefully hold back water downstream of the M4 motorway, resulting in water being released much slower towards the River Thames, thereby reducing flood risk. This scheme would require a significant amount of funding a stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder engagement had started positively, and an application had been made to DEFRA for their innovative flood resilience fund which, if successful, could be used to deliver this scheme.

- Was data relating to how many times an asset was visited recorded? Officer response – Yes, this was recorded and could be provided to Members on an annual basis.
- Loddon Bridge Road had a number of properties that were at risk of flooding, were any works planned to help these properties? Officer response – As these properties were close to the River Loddon, they could be at risk of fluvial and surface water flooding. Fluvial flooding risk would be reduced by the scheme mentioned above. Significant works regarding drainage had been carried out in that area to reduce the risk of surface water flooding, and therefore if this was still an issue then officers would take this away.
- Was South Lake the responsibility of WBC, and if so were we responsible if it flooded? Officer response – South Lake was owned by WBC, however it was not within the remit of the officers presenting this report. However, as it was a WBC asset then reports and mitigation measures would be in place.
- Members wished to thank officers for the thorough and well-presented report.
- Members wished to thank officers for the works carried out at Egremont Drive.
- There had been hope of other funding sources for the aforementioned major flood risk management scheme, had this materialised? Officer response – WBC had made an application to Thames Water, and were shortlisted as one of two authorities. Very little was then heard for a year and a half, and Thames Water had to significantly reduce the number of authorities that they could offer funding, from nine authorities to three. As a result, WBC unfortunately did not receive this funding. Officers were hoping to hear in April 2021 whether they DEFRA would progress our application to the next stage, which would require submission of a business case. Officers were hopeful that their feasibility case would help with this application. In addition, Thames Water had said that they were impressed with the works carried out within the Borough, and a partnership had now been created. There was a minimum of £125,000 available for the Borough to carry out surface water schemes.
- How many sandbags did the Borough have available? Officer response – Approximately 1500 filled bags and 4000 empty bags which were ready to be filled were available.
- Was there a threshold of silt in a gully that then led to it being cleared? Officer response – The percentages were actually in relation to how much of the inlet or outlet are covered. If it was over fifty percent, then works would be immediately carried out. Currently, when the percentage went above twenty percent, works were being carried out.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth and Francesca Hobson be thanked for attending the Committee;

- 2) Data relating to how often assets were visited be provided to Members on an annual basis;
- 3) Officers and contractors be thanked for their hard work relating to flood risk management within the Borough over the last year;
- 4) An update return to the Committee in approximately 12 months' time.

77. ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY

Shirley Boyt declared an interest in this item, and therefore did not participate in the discussions.

The Committee received a report, set out in agenda pages 11 to 24, which set out the proposed Arts & Culture strategy for the Borough.

The report outlined the consultation that had been undertaken regarding the proposed strategy, and the changes that had been made as a result. Some of the changes included contextualising the strategy within the frame of the Covid-19 (C-19) pandemic, reference to the declared climate emergency including a commitment to ensure that the aspiration to be carbon neutral is fully factored in to implementation plans and related activities, and the inclusion of one of a desired outcome being that of new and enhanced cultural venues.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor (Executive Member for Regeneration), Grant Thornton (Senior Specialist Economic Prosperity & Place), and Robin Cops (Vice Chair of the Arts & Culture Alliance) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- Would the northern Parishes be included in the Arts and Cultural Alliance (ACA)? Executive Member response – The ACA would welcome the contribution of the northern Parishes, as well as all other areas of the Borough. All Town and Parish Councils had been contacted as part of the development of the proposed policy, and it was hoped that more communities within the Borough would join the ACA as time progressed.
- Were we reaching out to people of an older generation? Executive Member response – The consultation had seen a far greater response rate from people of an older generation rather than those from a younger generation. As such, part of the action plan involved reaching out to younger people was seen to be a key action moving forward. The action plan had picked up issues including social isolation of older people, and therefore aimed to reach out to such individuals.
- It was noted that the ACA really valued the local knowledge from within specific communities, and welcomed engagement from across the Borough.
- It was noted that the proposed strategy was a framework, which aimed to identify gaps in the current support and provision of arts and cultural events, institutions and communities across the Borough.
- Which were the five Town and Parish Councils that had responded to the consultation? Officer response – A conclusive list would be provided outside of the meeting?

- Winnersh Parish Council would like to be involved in the ACA, was this planned? Executive Member response – All Towns and Parishes were welcomed and encouraged to get involved, and this included Winnersh.
- What considerations and adaptations had been made to the proposed strategy as a result of the C-19 pandemic? Executive Member response – Both the strategy and the action plan had been adapted throughout the course of the pandemic. Both the strategy and the action plan will be reviewed every 6 months during the pandemic and recovery stage, and then every year afterwards.
- How was the proposed strategy being prioritised against other WBC services? Executive Member response – There were lots of officers working on various aspects of the proposed strategy and action plan. The strategy had ties across many WBC services including economic development, adult social care, libraries, and children’s services. As such, the strategy was not seeking to compete with these services, but instead enhance them.
- Where did the ownership of the ACA sit? Executive Member response – The document itself was owned by WBC, however this was a true alliance and it was therefore a community centric strategy.
- Would the title of the strategy be changed to 2021-2031 as it was a ten year strategy? Officer response – Yes, this would be amended.
- What level of support was needed from WBC to support the ACA? Executive Member and Vice Chair of the ACA response – The current arts and cultural officer was a major start, as it provided a dedicated budget to support the strategy. In addition, there was support from various officer across the Council. Both the Council and the working group were ambitious, and resource was being pulled from various areas of the Council, though it was not specifically allocated. The extra resourcing worked well as it benefitted the community in ways including health and wellbeing, whilst progressing the ACA and the proposed strategy.
- It was noted that all areas of the Borough should be included within the ACA.
- It was noted that the ACA meant that a programme of ongoing outreach would be undertaken. Members were urged to get in touch if they knew of organisations or individuals who would like to get involved. It was noted that the Woodley Town Centre Management initiative had already been involved.
- All involved were thanked by the Committee for the comprehensive report, and the steps made to fulfilling parts of the overarching vision for the Wokingham Town Centre regeneration to become a cultural hub.
- What support would arts and cultural organisations require from WBC after the C-19 pandemic? Executive Member and Vice Chair of the ACA response – Organisations wanted a ‘can-do’ attitude from WBC. There had been a good history of tremendous support from WBC officers and many Members, and it was hoped that this would continue. Any outreach that WBC could offer to involve more young people would be greatly appreciated. WBC communications officers, sports and leisure staff, and library staff were used as a resource to help groups and organisations put on events and get

people involved. The 'WOCCA' app was available to help promote events across the Borough, and all residents should be encouraged to download it to know what is going on in their area and across the whole Borough.

- It was noted that a film studio was planned within the Borough, subject to planning permission. If approved and built, this would put the Borough on the map as a true hub for art and culture.
- The Chairman requested that the proposed strategy and action plan be added to the Committee's work programme on an annual basis, in order to monitor delivery and assist in making the Borough a hub for arts and culture.
- The Committee offered their support for the proposed strategy and action plan, and thanked all those involved in its development and future implementation.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Grant Thornton and Robin Cops be thanked for attending the Committee;
- 2) A list of the five Town and Parish Councils that had responded to the consultation be provided;
- 3) The title of the strategy be amended to make reference to 2021-2031;
- 4) An update be provided to the Committee on an annual basis in order to monitor delivery and assist in making the Borough a hub for arts and culture;
- 5) The strategy be commended to the Executive.

78. UPDATE ON MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

The Committee received a report, set out in agenda pages 25 to 28, which gave an update on the Elections due to be held in May 2021.

The report outlined that the number one priority was to ensure that a safe and secure election would be carried out across the Borough. In addition to this, there was a commitment to make the count and vote as timely as possible for electors and Members, whilst taking the above into consideration. It would therefore be a balance, with a longer counting process ensuring the safety of all involved, whilst still being as transparent and thorough as ever. Many polling stations would have additional measures in place to ensure that they were safe for electors and staff, whilst some venues would have to change to a more Covid-19 (C-19) secure venue.

Andre Moulton (Assistant Director – Governance) and Anne Hunter (Lead Specialist, Democratic & Electoral Services) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- When would the candidates and agents briefing take place? Officer response – This was planned for 9th March 2021 at 6pm.

- Was it planned to write to all electors who did not currently have a postal vote to inform them of the option to do so? Officer response – Yes, this was in the election project plan to set out the choices available to the electorate.
- What percentage of the Borough was currently registered to vote by post? Officer response – Approximately twenty percent of the Borough was registered to vote by post. This was subject to change as we approached the election.
- Would the letter to electors, explaining the options of a postal vote and containing a form to apply for one, be sent to people on the current register of electors or the March register? Officer response – The letter would be sent to people on the register at the time when the letter was finalised.
- What campaigning would be allowed regarding this election? Officer response – Any interested groups or persons would be advised to keep close attention to the Electoral Commission's website for any and all advice.
- It was noted that the count would be conducted in stages, to ensure that the numbers within the counting area were at safe and C-19 compliant levels.
- Members supported the strategy of informing residents of their options to vote by post, as this would be more comfortable and safer for a lot of people this year.
- Were the elections team able to access more support to administer these elections safely? Officer response – There was already additional resource within the core team to help manage the workload. As a corporate event, the team had support right across the Council.
- Were nomination forms be required to be wet signed this year? Officer response – Yes, and the candidates and agents briefing would provide additional information regarding this.
- It was noted that the count for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) would not be undertaken centrally this year, as it was a decision for the Area Returning Officer as to how the count was conducted.
- Was there any ways that schools being used as polling stations could remain open on polling day? Officer response – Officers had done a lot of work over recent years to reduce the number of schools being used as a polling station, and we were now down to four schools across the Borough. Officers were working directly with those four schools to see how the impacts of polling day could be mitigated for them.
- Had the role of a teller been considered considering the C-19 pandemic? Officer response – Yes, this issue was on the risk assessment list.
- It was noted that Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) were encouraging and informing residents about the opportunity to vote by post, and it was definitively not about mandating it. Polling stations would be safe and secure, however this gave people a further option to cast their vote should they wish.
- The Chairman proposed that a joint meeting of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee be arranged in the late

summer or autumn of 2021, to evaluate lessons learned from the running of this election in conjunction with the corporate risk register.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Andrew Moulton and Anne Hunter be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The Committee give their thanks to the Elections Team for their ongoing work to deliver a safe and transparent set of elections;
- 3) A joint meeting of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee be arranged in the late summer or autumn of 2021, to evaluate lessons learned from the running of this election in conjunction with the corporate risk register.

79. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their remaining meeting of the current municipal year, set out on agenda page 29.

RESOLVED That the work programme be noted.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 22 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Bill Soane (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
Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young
Catherine Hickman, Lead Specialist, Audit and Investigation
Mark Thompson, Chief Accountant
Bob Watson, Assistant Director Finance
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Francesca Churchhouse, Ernst & Young

43. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Dianne King.

44. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Imogen Shepherd-DuBey declared a Personal Interest regarding Item 48 Statement of Accounts 2019-20 on the grounds that she had money in the Berkshire Pension Fund.

Councillor Daniel Sargeant declared a Personal Interest in Items 47 Wokingham Borough Council Audit Results Report Year ended 31 March 2020 and Item 48 Statement of Accounts 2019-20 on the grounds that he was a Non Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Limited and Berry Brook Homes.

45. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

46. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

46.1 Gary Cowan asked the Chairman of the Audit Committee the following question. Due to his inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question

Agenda Page 227 (Corporate Risk Register) states that on July 18th, 2019, a Motion was passed at Council declaring a climate emergency. The Council gave itself six months to establish the Borough's carbon footprint and develop an action plan setting how the Council would achieve its targets by 2030. The report goes on to add Further Actions to Mitigate Risk mentions Cross Council officer group established and ongoing work of working group with further report back to Council in 2021 on progress against target.

At its meeting on 21st January 2021 the Council considered a Motion (450), submitted by Andy Croy, and seconded by Carl Doran. 'Council believes the Executive should commission a Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Emergency. A Citizens' Assembly on the

Wokingham Borough response to the Climate Emergency is required to address the hard choices which need to be made if the Borough is to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. The Motion was defeated as every Conservative present with the exception of the Mayor and his Deputy voted against the motion.

My question therefore is what assurance has the Audit Committee sought with regards to the effectiveness of the mitigating actions around the Climate Emergency risk on the Corporate Risk Register?

Answer

With regards to risk management, the Audit Committee's remit is to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the Risk Management Strategy and the associated control environment. This includes, but is not limited to, receiving quarterly reports reviewing the implementation of the Council's Risk Management Policy and Strategy to determine whether strategic risks are being actively managed.

To discharge this responsibility, I ensure that the Committee receives comprehensive reports from officers on the Corporate Risk Register and that Committee members are able to assure themselves that the Council is actively managing its most significant risks. The Committee does this in a number of ways including through questions to the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, and Directors who regularly attend our meetings.

It is pleasing to note the comments of our External Auditors later on this evening's agenda that risk management arrangements have been strengthened over the past period albeit I acknowledge the helpful suggestions for further improvement including the comment that the Committee should avoid taking "active deep dives" into individual risks which I fear your question may be encouraging us to do. Indeed, the External Auditors go to say that it may be better covered by the work of Overview & Scrutiny which, I know, has already examined the topic of climate emergency in some depth during 2020 and reported its recommendations to Executive in October 2020.

Climate emergency is a priority for the Council which is why it is reassuring and correct to see it identified as one the key strategic risks on the Corporate Risk Register. Following the climate emergency declaration made in July 2019, Wokingham Borough Council adopted a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). Within this plan, the Council committed to communicate and engage with residents, businesses, schools, and other organisations to work together to identify and deliver actions towards reducing the Borough's carbon footprint and encourage behaviour change.

Overall, the Climate Emergency Action Plan aims to deliver warmer homes, cleaner air, better health, more green spaces, as well as reduced emissions. However, despite the Council's best efforts, many of the outcomes of the CEAP rely on factors which are outside the Council's control. The effective delivery of the action plan depends on the influence and support of multiple agencies.

Citizen's assemblies have been reviewed as a potential process that can provide a good way of drawing attention to the climate emergency agenda. Although, this can bring out diverse perspectives on the complexity of climate change, the Council concluded at its meeting of 21 January 2021 that this might not be the most adequate engagement tool at this stage. Gaining a broadly representative group of people can be challenging and expensive, and the process for developing and planning an assembly is intensive and demanding on human and time resources. An indicative budget for a local citizens'

assembly, consisting of approximately 50 participants for 32 hours of learning, deliberation, and decision-making range between £60,000 to £100,000. ¹The Council concluded that there are most cost-effective engagement tools and that funds that will be required to deliver a citizen assembly can be directed to more effective actions.

Engagement and public consultation are activities that Wokingham Borough Council have extensive experience with, and frequently do, as a key element to produce and deliver policy or projects. The Council regularly carry out survey work, liaise with pressure and action groups and implement methods for hearing and acting upon individual opinions on different matters. The communication and engagement of the Climate Emergency Action Plan will be built upon the Council's experience and from tried and tested tools and mechanisms delivered by other organisations and local authorities.

In conclusion, I would reiterate the importance of the Committee focusing on its remit and continuing to provide both challenge, oversight and constructive suggestions to help the Council develop and improve further its risk management arrangements, and I am sure that, if you'd care to stay for item 49 on this evening's agenda, you will see that in action.

47. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT RESULTS REPORT YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2020

Members received the Wokingham Borough Council Audit Results report year ended 31 March 2020.

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

- Helen Thompson, Ernst & Young, commented that the audit was largely completed in the less complex areas. However, work remained outstanding on 4 areas; valuations, pension fund disclosures, Group accounts (consolidation) and going concern.
- Ernst & Young had already identified with Officers, changes that would need to be made to the Statement of Accounts. These had not been included in the results report or amended at this stage as there was likely to be further changes, particularly around the work of valuations on property, plant and equipment. All changes would be consolidated into one for ease.
- With regards to valuations, it was an area of focus for reviewers of audit quality, and work in this area had increased significantly over time. Ernst & Young had asked its valuation specialists to review 11 assets. There remained open queries on 4 of these assets, which may or may not have a wider impact on the asset portfolio. For the assets (operational land and buildings) revalued as at 31 March, a number of queries had been identified leading to a review of the source evidence that was being used for the assumptions that were then used in a valuation. The internal valuer had updated the source evidence. In addition, with regards to assets that had been revalued in prior years, evidence had been sought on processes used.
- Helen Thompson commented that she welcomed the Council's approach of updating the valuation approach in the future, such as employing an external valuer to provide support to the internal valuation team, and also to review the cycle for valuations.

¹ Involve <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/how-do-i-setup-citizens-assembly/frequently-asked-questions>

- With regards to the assurances from the pensions funds auditor, the report had been received from Deloitte in January. However, this had been issued prior to the completion of the audit and several review queries remained outstanding.
- With regards to Group Accounting, the work of the component auditors had been reviewed and no issues had been identified. However, the accounting policies particularly around property, plant and equipment differed between the Council and its subsidiaries. Work was being undertaken to realign the policies and to restate the figures.
- With regards to Going Concern, it had been an area of focus this year because of the pandemic and significant changes to income and expenditure streams. Updated Management Disclosures would be included in the final Statement of Accounts.
- Ernst & Young were producing a plan which would be agreed with the Finance team and the Valuations team.
- Councillor Burgess asked what the impact would be on income expenditure and the balance sheet. Helen Thompson stated that based on amendments that had been collated to date, there were adjustments that would have an impact but that they would largely net off against each other. There would be no impact on the bottom line. In terms of whether the asset value would go up or down it was difficult to say until queries had been worked through.
- Councillor Burgess went on to question what had caused the large credit to the income and expenditure statement for revaluations this year. In addition, she questioned whether the Assistant Director Finance supported a different means of valuing those assets valued on a rolling basis. The Chief Accountant indicated that Note 23 of the accounts, a breakdown of the revaluation reserve, showed how valuations had changed. The main driver for the net £64million credit to the income and expenditure account was due to an upward revaluation of assets of £79 million and a downward revaluation of £15million. The valuation process going forwards would be looked at.
- Councillor Ross commented it was disappointing that the pension fund was again an issue. With regards to valuations, he asked whether it became more difficult to get accurate valuation figures some time after the valuation period. Helen Thompson emphasised that pensions was not the only delay in the audit. With regards to valuations, the type of points considered were the assumptions used when making the valuations. There could also be differences in assumptions used by valuers.
- Councillor Gee questioned why the valuation of playing fields at £1million per acre had been removed from the updated report. Helen Thompson responded that some detail had been removed whilst an ongoing query was resolved. Councillor Gee questioned whether the £1million related to a development value rather than a current use value. It was explained that it related to reprovision and what the Council would have to pay to replace it. In a developed Borough such as Wokingham the higher end of the scale was more likely.
- Councillor Gee asked if it was likely that it would be almost impossible to value future liabilities, as interest rates continued to decrease.
- Councillor Gee stated that in the context of internal control, she felt that the Committee's reporting line to Council had been overlooked.
- In response to a query from Councillor Shepherd-DuBey it was clarified that the values of properties were looked at on a regular basis. Certain categories were also valued on a yearly basis.
- Councillor Burgess asked about the stress testing carried out around going concern and how comfortable the Council was looking 12 months ahead, taking that stress

testing into account. The Assistant Director Finance stated that all local authorities should be deemed a going concern because they were backed by Central Government.

- Councillor Burgess referred to the recommendation that senior management review the capacity of the Finance team. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that he had put forwards a revised structure for finance. Councillor Gee asked for a report at the next Committee meeting on what action had been taken and staffing levels. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that during the pandemic many staff around the Council had been redeployed to help with the Council's response. He suggested that the size of the Finance team going forwards be confirmed prior to a report being produced.
- Councillor Burgess questioned when the Committee would receive the survey on the effectiveness of the Audit Committee, to identify strength and weaknesses of the Committee and training requirements. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that the survey was being produced.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The draft Wokingham Borough Council Audit Results Report Year ended 31 March 2020, be noted.
- 2) The final report be considered at an extraordinary meeting of the Audit Committee on 22 March 2021 7pm.

48. STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019-20

The Committee received the Statement of Accounts 2019-20.

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

- The Assistant Director Finance indicated that the Statement of Accounts was not yet ready for sign off. There were 4 areas outstanding that were still under discussion with Ernst & Young; treatment of valuations, pensions, Group Accounts, statement of going concern.
- The Assistant Director Finance indicated that he had no real concerns as to the Council's current position. Both the Council's Finance team and Ernst & Young had been working hard on the audit. The pandemic had had an impact on the speed of the process.
- The Assistant Director Finance indicated that the Committee could either bring the finalised Statement of Accounts to an additional extraordinary Committee meeting in March or delegate the sign off to the Deputy Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Audit Committee, subject to there being no adverse audit opinion. The final audit report and the final Statement of Accounts would be shared with Members. Members agreed that they wished for an additional meeting to be arranged.
- Councillor Burgess questioned what the deadline was for the availability of the final audited accounts. Helen Thompson indicated that there was no statutory deadline for the publication of the audited accounts. Regulations required that for the year that the Council was in, it should by 30 November either publish the final Statement of Accounts, with the audit report and the auditor's opinion, on its website, or a statement as to why this had not been achieved. There was no penalty for this deadline having not been met.
- Councillor Gee noted that lending to the subsidiaries had been increased and questioned whether this would be recoverable. The Assistant Director Finance

clarified that loans had been made to allow the companies to continue developments around the housing area.

- Councillor Gee commented that the fair value of borrowings was £90million higher than the borrowings. The Assistant Director Finance stated that when a loan was taken out it was taken out at the prevailing best rates of the time.
- Councillor Gee referred to a loss on some property, plant and equipment. The Chief Account clarified that this was a result of the academisation of a school.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The draft Statement of Accounts 2019-20, be noted.
- 2) The final report be considered at an extraordinary meeting of the Audit Committee on 22 March 2021 7pm.

49. CORPORATE RISK MANAGEMENT

The Assistant Director Governance presented the Corporate Risk Management report.

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

- Risk 1 Budgeting and Financial Management had been re-assessed from “very high” to “high” following the proposed balanced budget being presented to Council on 18 February.
- Risk 10 “End of the EU Transition” had been updated. The Government had recently released a press release that gave further assurances around negotiations between the EU and the UK and it looked significantly less likely that the EU would consider the UK as a ‘third country.’
- Risk 12 “Adult Social Care Provider Failure” had reduced in severity from “very high” to “high” as a consequence of the positive impact of mitigating actions.
- Risk 13 “Climate Emergency” had been updated to reflect the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group’s report and recommendations which had been agreed at Executive on 29 October.
- The description of the equalities risk (no. 17) had been revised to reflect the Covid-related impact to this risk noting the Council’s proposed approach to tackling poverty and new Equality Plan (to be considered by Executive in March).
- The Pandemic risk (no. 18) had been updated to reflect the outcomes of Overview & Scrutiny in considering the Council’s response to the first wave.
- The Housing Numbers (no. 19) has been re-assessed from “high” to “medium” following the Government announcement in mid-December that it planned to prioritise urban and brownfield sites.
- Two new risks had been added:
 - Market failure (no 20) reflecting the economic and financial impacts of Covid-19 on key providers of Council services.
 - 2021 Elections (no. 21) reflecting the additional challenges of delivering successful elections against a backdrop of public health restrictions.
- Councillor Burgess commented that the controls listed for the Climate Emergency risk were insufficient and that the mitigating actions did not adequately address the risk. She felt that the Climate Emergency Action Plan contained some errors that needed to be addressed. In addition, she suggested that the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group established by Overview and Scrutiny should be included in the register as a control. The Assistant Director Governance agreed that it would be added. Members were reminded that an Internal Audit of Climate Emergency

was planned for Q1. The Assistant Director Governance suggested that the Chairman of the Audit Committee liaise with the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Chairman to ensure that the Committee's concerns around the Climate Emergency risk were addressed in their work.

- Councillor Gee noted that there were a number of high risks when the Council was supposed to be a low risk Council and questioned how this would be addressed.
- Councillor Gee questioned how the Committee should review the Corporate Risk Register if it did not undertake a deep dive. The Assistant Director Governance stated that the Committee needed to have assurance that the process of risk management in the Council, was sound. He referred to the Committee's remit in relation to risk management. Further training around risk management could be undertaken. Helen Thompson emphasised that the Committee should not be heavily involved in how the risks were being addressed. Risks should come off as well as on to the Corporate Risk Register. The tolerance to risk would vary between individual risks.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned whether a number of risks should be combined, in particular risks 4 and 19.
- In response to a Member question the Assistant Director Governance commented that the EU transition risk was likely to be able to be removed from the Corporate Risk Register shortly. Members were reminded that if an item came off the Corporate Risk Register it could still be managed at Directorate level if required.
- Councillor Burgess suggested that the wording of the Local Plan risk be revised as some information was out of date. It was agreed that this risk would be updated.
- Councillor Burgess proposed adding the Audit Committee self-assessment into the actions around the Corporate Governance risk.
- Justine Thorpe, Ernst & Young, indicated that they would be happy to join future training sessions and to talk about the Committee's role with regards to risk management in more detail.
- The Corporate Risk Register should underpin the Council's Corporate Plan.

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

50. UPDATE ON INTERNAL AUDIT & INVESTIGATIONS INCLUDING QUARTER 1 PLAN FOR 2021/22

The Lead Specialist, Audit and Investigation presented the update on Internal Audit and Investigations including the 2021/22 Internal Audit Strategy and 2021/22 Audit and Investigation Work Programme Quarter 1

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

- The report provided an update on the work of Internal Audit and Investigations activity up to December 2020. There had been no audits that had received less than level 2 Audit opinion during this period.
- For the remainder of the financial year the team was focused on completing the remaining audits contained within the 2020/21 Audit and Investigation Plan to feed into the Head of Internal Audit Opinion on the Council's Governance, Internal Control and Risk Management Arrangements.
- This year had been a period of uncertainty as councils had responded to the pandemic and their changing risk profiles. The extent to which the team had been able to deliver planned audit activity had been impacted because of the availability

of auditees who had needed to respond to the effects of the pandemic within their services

- Usually, an annual Audit Plan would be prepared for the forthcoming financial year. However, it had been agreed with the Corporate Leadership Team that a one-year plan would not be practical at this time. Flexibility and forward thinking were required in planning audit activities for the forthcoming financial year and as such, it had been agreed that for the 2021/22 financial year, audit planning would be on a quarterly basis.
- Councillor Sargeant commented that the plan of work for Q1 was quite ambitious. The Lead Specialist Audit and Investigations stated that the Plan had been produced according to the resources available at the time. However, a watching brief was required because of the impacts there had been on resource availability within the Internal Audit team during the current year due to redeployments from the team to service areas to assist with responses to the pandemic. The Committee would be informed of any significant changes.
- Councillor Burgess stated that in order for the Climate Emergency audit to be successful it needed to address the level of carbon savings planned to be achieved by the Climate Emergency Action Plan. The Lead Specialist Internal Audit and Investigation indicated that this could be considered when the audit was scoped. The Assistant Director Governance added that consideration would be given to what external expertise might be required to assist in the audit.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The 2020/21 Internal Audit and Investigation Progress Report be noted;
- 2) The Internal Audit and Investigation Strategy for 2021/22 be approved;
- 3) The Quarter 1 Plan for 2021/22 be approved;
- 4) The Internal Audit on Climate Emergency include an accounting style carbon audit of the Climate Emergency Action Plan targets, the methodology and the underlying assumptions, in the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present

Gary Cowan
Pauline Helliard-Symons

94. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

95. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

96. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:

The weekly rate to 20th February in Wokingham is now 48.5 today, which is well below the peak of 606 on the 4th January but still compares very badly to the below five in August. We suspect that we will hover around this figure for some time. Happily, both hospitalisations and deaths are also stable. Our lives have changed, unrecognisably for some, and many lives have so sadly been lost. I can only restate my condolences for those that have suffered so much.

I would like again to say again to a big thank you to everybody who has stepped up to the plate and made it possible for life to continue during these appalling times.

It has never been more vital that we play our role and continue to observe the rules.

Earlier this week the PM made a statement on a roadmap for easing lockdown restrictions in England. Vaccines are at the heart of the government strategy, with 17million people having received the vaccine. The Government is taking a cautious approach to easing lockdown, guided by the data to avoid surge infections that would put unsustainable pressure on the NHS. When moving from one step to another in the roadmap the Government will examine data to assess the impact of the previous step. This will be based on four tests:

- The vaccine deployment programme continues successfully;
- Evidence showing vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisation;
- Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisation;
- Assessment of risk is not fundamentally changed by new variants or of concern.

As we move forward on the road map, the Council will have a central role in its success. Moreover, this is part of our Recovery strategy. For example, rolling out the vaccination is critical. We are doing all that we can to enable this with our health partners. Expanding and scaling our community testing offer on lateral flow testing will be crucial – building on the Shute End and the Microsoft sites as we know that 1 in 3 people are asymptomatic. To be successful this testing needs to be part of everybody's daily routine. We need to

change the behaviour and continually check for positive cases so that these cases can then self-isolate. We need to have an enhanced tracing regime to ensure those residents who are positive, do self-isolate. We need to rapidly deploy thousands of PCR tests door to door should the data suggest we have a problem in the Borough.

Also, we need to maintain our excellent support to groups particularly at risk from Covid such as those in care home. At the same time, we need to address inequalities ensuring for example that those disenfranchised are testing and receiving vaccinations, and that we are addressing vaccination hesitancy.

Therefore, as part of recovery and outbreak management we need to have a tailored approach to our communities.

Alongside our efforts on Covid Contain as part of Recovery we are also focussing on the following areas.

- Supporting businesses and stimulating job creation and skills;
- Physical and mental wellbeing;
- Maintaining resilient and sustainable services;
- Harnessing digital and data for insight;
- Focussing on children and young people and education;
- Inequality and social inclusion.

We are already moving forward and taking action on these recovery themes and a report will be brought to the Executive on action taken so far and future action.

At the Council in February, I stated that the budget put forward was a budget for recovery. It provides almost half a billion pounds over the next three years for investment in our community and a considerable amount of this will stimulate our local economy and seek to address the housing needs in the Borough for those not currently able to afford to buy their homes. The budget also provided considerable additional ongoing investment into our care services, including the likes of the Domestic Abuse service, to ensure that we can support our residents in overcoming the fall out of this terrible virus. You may also be aware that we have done much work recently on our Poverty Strategy, our Equalities Strategy, these are also a critical part of our recovery strategy.

The main item today is the Council's approach to Covid as reviewed by Overview & Scrutiny. The administration believes that O&S provides a vital function for our decision making and democracy, and has sought to ensure that it is far reaching and unfettered in its work. For example, the budget now is reviewed by O&S prior to adoption over a period in excess of six months.

Thank you to all the officers involved and the work of overview and scrutiny in reviewing our Covid response as we can always learn more. Thank you very much.

97. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

97.1 David Dunham asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Question

I would like to ask the Council/Councillors about the issues we have experienced at the Bradbury Centre and the lack of Parking at times.

On an average day at the Bradbury Centre Vaccine centre we see anything from 900+ to a high of 1400 people being vaccinated, people receiving the Pfizer jab have to be monitored for 15 minutes inside before being allowed to leave, the Astra Zeneca again 15 minutes before being allowed to drive.

There are only approximately 15 spaces available free of charge for people to use.

The vaccine centre uses the centre once a week, the Town centre is relatively quiet due to lockdown, there are five other car parks around the Town Centre, that could be used.

Whilst Wokingham are doing extremely well with the vaccination programme, could the Rose Street car park be allocated vaccine centre car park only for that one day a week? The loss of revenue would be minimal in comparison to the benefits, especially as there are many who still need to be vaccinated who are on the vulnerable list.

Waitrose have been kind enough to allow all volunteers to use their car park, so it would be used for those attending to receive their vaccine.

Answer

The way the parking in that car park works at the moment is that we have set aside some space for people getting vaccinations and that is being managed to make sure that people who are not getting vaccinations are not going to be parking in the area that is allocated. I am very happy to take away your suggestion and see if there is enough space there and make adjustments to make sure that there is enough space for the people who have been vaccinated.

Supplementary Question

Currently we have 14 spaces allocated in that car park and if we have roughly, not everybody drives, 8 people every 4 minutes and they did happen to drive, that potentially could be at the most, 32 cars. With the vaccinations they have to sit for 15 minutes as you are probably aware with the Pfizer, indoors, and not drive, sit in their cars for 15 minutes for the other one. We are also having problems; the parking wardens have recently been hovering shall we say to see those who are not parking in those allocated spaces. 5 of those 14 spaces are also disabled spaces which are the ones right next to the old M&S building, so we do not want to put anybody in those. We want those to stay for disabled people. They could do with another line of spaces that is all.

Supplementary Answer

Let me take it away and look at it, David. I am very happy to make sure that there is enough parking.

We obviously do not want to provide too much as we want to make sure that everybody is able to use the car park.

97.2 Anne Chadwick asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

The report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee of Wokingham Borough Council on its response to the Covid-19 pandemic report and recommendations of November 2020 states that the majority of child protection visits remained face-to-face (97%) in June 2020. How have child protection visits been conducted during the latest lockdown?

Answer

Throughout the pandemic children's social workers have been committed to undertaking visits to children in person and face to face. This can be seen in the high number of face to face visits that were completed during periods of national restrictions. Children's Social Care developed a set of Practice Standards that provide a structured decision-making process in relation to all visits to children, to ensure that any risks are mitigated. The standards highlight that all children subject to a Child Protection plan will receive face-to-face visits within the usual statutory timelines, or more frequently if required. There are exceptions and these are:

- When a member of a household or placement has symptoms of COVID-19
- When a member of a household or placement has a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- When a member of a household or placement is within a recommended period of self-isolation.

When any of these circumstances arise, a Covid 19 Visiting and PPE Risk Assessment is undertaken by the allocated Social Worker and their Team Manager. This will give them information on the

- risks to child
- risks to families
- risks to the workforce
- national guidance on social distancing and hygiene
- statutory responsibilities, including safeguarding

Any decision to undertake a virtual visit requires management oversight and agreement.

Since 1st January this year to the 19th February a total of 783 Child Protection visits have been completed by Wokingham social workers. Out of this number 5.4 % have been virtual and 94.6% of visits have been undertaken in person and face to face by a social worker. So, I think you will agree that we are doing our very best to ensure that we have everything covered.

97.3 Daniel Hinton asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

Can you give us an update on the current level of Covid in care homes across the Borough?

Answer

At the start of the pandemic, Wokingham Borough Council set up a specialist Covid-19 Taskforce; made up of WBC employees they work closely with care homes across the Borough.

Since then, the team has provided vital support to our care homes and their residents, ensuring they stay as safe as possible, and particularly trying to support them when we have been in the position of having outbreaks.

From daily calls to share information and assist with any issues and concerns; to supporting with risk assessments, problem solving and testing; the team is there to assess the needs of everybody and to put support in place when it is needed.

Working in close partnership with our local providers, we are now seeing fortunately low Covid-19 case numbers in Wokingham. Across our 52 care homes, which is a lot larger than any of the nearby Boroughs, there currently are two Covid positive residents and three Covid positive members of staff, which is a vast improvement on where we were a few months ago.

Following a peak in the case rate in Wokingham at the beginning of January, the rate has now fallen steadily, and we are below the national and South East comparable rates. As the Leader said at the start of the meeting the current rate is below 50 per 100,000 and most encouragingly of all the rate in residents over the age of 60 is now hovering around 30 per 100,000, when the average for the South East is around 69.8.

As I am sure you are aware, Central Government has, announced this week that care home residents will be permitted one designated visitor from 8th March, which is obviously very good news. Our Task Force will continue to work with care homes and colleagues from across the sector to minimise the risk of community transmission and to ensure that Lateral Flow Testing is available and to fully facilitate anyone who is chosen as the chosen visitor.

Supplementary Question

Does WBC have a message for residents to ensure that this forward number continues going forwards?

Supplementary Answer

The situation is very encouraging and as I said we are generally below the Berkshire average, the South East England average etc. But you know that has been achieved for a reason because people here have generally been following the guidelines; keeping 2 metres social distancing, wearing masks where appropriate and washing hands properly. It is really, really important if we want to keep downwards pressure on the rate as hard as possible, to do those things. If you are called for a vaccine, please go because that is the way out of this.

97.4 Sam Akhtar asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question

The Council navigated a firm course through the emergency looking after the needy, protecting the residents and standing up for the Borough where necessary. I am delighted that the Executive had the strength of conviction. Well done.

How prepared is the Council for recovery and what is its strategy?

Answer

Thank you, Sam, for your question. It is pleasing and reassuring to hear the appreciation of the Council's response to the pandemic. It means a lot to know that our endeavours were felt amongst the community at such a vital time. Our response is not over yet of

course, so we must keep focused on this and doing all we can. And as you rightly point out, the Council also has a key role to play in recovery.

At Council in February, I stated that the budget put forward was a budget for recovery; it provides almost half a billion pounds over the next three years for investment in our community and a considerable amount of this will stimulate our local economy and seek to address the housing needs in the Borough for those not currently able to afford to buy their homes. The budget also provided considerable additional ongoing investment in our care services, including the likes of the Domestic Abuse service and Mental Health, to ensure we can support our residents in overcoming the fall out of this terrible virus. You may also be aware that we have done much work recently on our Poverty Strategy and our Equalities Strategy. These are also critical parts of our recovery strategy.

In March we will be refreshing our Vision and Corporate Delivery plan in the context of the impact of Covid-19 and the need for recovery and in May I hope to be able to bring a specific Recovery Strategy to the Executive that identifies our key themes for attention. Most of the recovery work is of course already progressing, for example; improving our offer to low to medium mental health support, stimulating economic recovery and helping our children achieve their development potential. However, this strategy will help us bring all these work-streams together and ensure they are not forgotten as we embark on our significant role in helping create a brighter, purposeful and happier future for our whole community.

**97.5 Shahid Younis asked the Leader of the Council the following question:
Question**

Wokingham is one of the affluent places to live, work and bring up a family. However, in certain wards 17% of children live in poverty. What strategy does the Council have in place to reduce child poverty in Wokingham?

Answer

The Executive agreed the Council's approach to tackling poverty at its meeting in January 2021 and work is underway to better understand the causes and effects for residents and families in the Borough and what we can do more of to improve outcomes for all. Child poverty will be a key consideration and actions to reduce poverty generally in the Borough will positively affect children who may be living in poverty because of their family situation.

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

We are already doing a lot to address this issue; we are not starting from scratch. For example, we have made good progress in addressing the drivers of poverty, through maximising affordable housing, providing good quality Council housing and addressing homelessness to ensure families and children have access to safe and secure accommodation. In fact, I would add that at the Executive next week, or the week after, we will be putting together a paper to increase the amount of council homes that we are building.

We also have a scheme in place to alleviate the impacts on fuel poverty. The scheme has benefited a number of our households through Energy Efficiency upgrades to homes,

which could save residents more than 30% on their annual fuel bills. These savings can help improve financial security of families which will directly benefit children.

Another example is through our out-reach work, often in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector, we support our residents to lead self-sustaining lifestyles, including addressing food insecurity through initiatives such as the Grub Club and Social Bites, which has positive benefits for children.

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

98. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

98.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

The agenda Page 8 states and I quote:

Care Home in Wokingham are usually run by private or voluntary sector service providers. Wokingham Borough Council has a responsibility to support the needs of the individual and maintain the financial sustainability of the social care market. It does not have a direct responsibility to manage an outbreak within a Wokingham Care Home but has continued to support providers to manage outbreaks during the pandemic.

From the start of the pandemic the Council has worked proactively to deliver support and advice to the care homes and other care settings in the Borough. Adult Social Care has provided support to care homes, through its Care Home Task Force, providing guidance on infection control, support with PPE, distribution of Government grant funding and immediate, targeted support in the event of Covid-19 outbreaks.

My question is, is the Council satisfied that it has worked just as proactively to deliver support and advice to our residents and businesses in the vicinity of the care homes where there has been reported cases of infection and sadly loss of life in the Borough.

Answer

Care homes have been particularly vulnerable to Covid 19 outbreaks but most of all at times when rates of infection are high in the community. High community rates of transmission increase the risk that staff or residents leaving the care home contract the virus, with subsequent onward transmission within the care home setting, amongst those who are elderly and vulnerable.

Outbreaks in Care Homes have been managed effectively and contained through all the necessary infection control measures and public health action to manage this risk of community transmission.

Throughout the pandemic, the Council has worked in partnership with local residents and businesses to minimise the risk of community transmission. Measures have been

introduced throughout Wokingham, including physical barriers to manage pedestrian flows, signage, targeted communication and Covid Marshalls.

The activity of the Marshalls has been directed by Public Health data and local intelligence to ensure resources are deployed where they have been needed. This obviously includes when we have had large outbreaks. Our Covid Support Team works closely with the Police, Localities and Town and Parishes to ensure community compliance and we have completed over 3,000 business and safety inspections.

Wokingham's local Case Tracing Service, which is part of the NHS Test and Trace system, has enabled the Council to ensure welfare needs are understood and that residents have been signposted to services to support their needs. At the time of writing, we have made 416 successful self-isolation calls. That has led to 101 people being referred to the One Front Door System for further support. The service aims to reach residents within the Borough to ensure that support and guidance is made available in a timely fashion to support isolation.

In addition to this we have launched our lateral flow rapid testing programme to all keyworkers in the Borough, there are currently two centres open with a third due to open shortly. The aim of this is that they can work safely, and we can better control and identify the risk of the spread of infection. So far this has done more than 4,000 tests.

Where we have seen Care Home outbreaks, the Council has targeted resources within the local community. This has included Marshal Patrols and an addition in signage, with staff working alongside local residents and businesses to highlight risks and to ensure compliance. For example, when there was an outbreak at the Shinfield View care home we arranged daily Covid Marshalls patrols and located four large temporary feather signs in Shinfield outside key shops and the garage and a number of additional standard signs to reassure the community, and to try and send the right messages out locally.

99. TO CONSIDER ANY REPORTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

99.1 Officer Response to the Recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Report - WBC's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Executive considered a report setting out the Officer response to the recommendations included in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee following their review of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee introduced the report. She praised the research that had been undertaken during the review, the contribution made by all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the cross party working undertaken.

Councillor Helliard-Symons highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee had been provided with results of the residents' survey regarding how the Council had responded to the pandemic, which had been very positive. Twelve areas had been reviewed and Councillor Helliard-Symons highlighted the impact on people's mental health, poverty and care leavers needing exemption from council tax to the age of 25, as areas that Members had had particular concerns about. She was pleased to note that a number of these had been or were already being addressed.

Staff welfare had been a key priority throughout the pandemic and 45 members of staff were training to become mental health first aiders.

Councillor Helliard-Symons praised the way in which the Council had worked with its partners throughout the pandemic. It was hoped that this would continue and that lessons would continue to be learned. Two recommendations around this had been added.

Councillor Jorgensen commented that there had been quick decision making in a crisis and questioned how this had been funded. Councillor Kaiser indicated that the Council had started the pandemic with a good level of reserves but also a crisis had not been allowed to turn into a disaster. Staff had been very adaptable, and a good level of support had been received from the Voluntary Sector. Government grants had also been received.

With regards to the response from the Voluntary Sector, Councillor Margetts indicated that the response initially focused on food and prescription delivery and was now focused on supporting the vaccination delivery. He praised the partnership working with the Voluntary Sector.

Councillor Clark asked how well the Council was performing in comparison to other local authorities with regards to vaccinations and tests. Councillor Margetts responded that the supply of vaccinations had been an issue, but that vaccination of Group 6 had begun. He believed that Wokingham was slightly further ahead than neighbouring boroughs. The Council was providing support in the form of buildings and volunteers amongst others. He had written to the CCG for further information on vaccinations.

Councillor Clark commented that Children's Services always ensured that children were safe, and the schools and settings were supported. She felt that greater reference could have also been made to Kooth. Councillor Helliard-Symons indicated that the report could not be amended but that Councillor Clark's comments would be taken on board.

Councillor Smith stated that the way staff had adapted to the situation and had interacted with community groups, was admirable.

Councillor Murray praised the focus of the report on mental health. He felt that all Members and more Officers should undertake the mental health first aider training in the future, given the increased focus on this area.

Councillor Kaiser questioned what was being done to involve communities, such as the BAME community, in the vaccination programme. Councillor Margetts responded that positive messages regarding the safety of the vaccination were being targeted.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Officers' responses be noted and the recommendations as set out in the Overview and Scrutiny report and contained within this report be agreed;
- 2) the Officers' responses be noted and the two additional recommendations submitted by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, at its meeting on 20 January 2021, be agreed.

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