

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.55 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Parry Batth, Graham Howe, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane and Phil Cunnington (substituting Charles Margetts)

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Bishop-Firth
Stephen Conway
David Hare

38. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Charles Margetts.

39. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29 July 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive meeting held on 29 July 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Leader of Council.

It was noted that there was a typo in the minutes of the Extraordinary meeting and that the meeting had taken place in the evening and not the morning.

40. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor John Halsall declared a Personal Interest in Item 43 Procurement of Adult Social Care Voluntary Sector Service on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a Personal Interest in Item 43 Procurement of Adult Social Care Voluntary Sector Service on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis.

Councillor John Kaiser declared a Personal Interest in Item 46 Housing Allocations Policy 2021 on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Stuart Munro declared a Personal Interest in Item 46 Housing Allocations Policy 2021 on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a Personal Interest in Item 46 Housing Allocations Policy 2021 on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

41. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

It is now nineteen months since our first Covid case. The rate of new Covid cases within the Borough remains high and is rising as we begin to see the impact of returning to school and returning to workplaces. The current rate is 296 per 100,000 (compared to 211 this time last week) and this is expected to continue to rise further over the coming weeks. The rate within the Borough remains slightly above, but in line with, the rates across the South-East (280 per 100,000). Most cases continue to occur within the school age

population, in line with the rest of the country. We must remain cautious and continue to work hard to reduce transmission of the virus within our Borough.

We are working closely with our Head Teachers and school communities through the Children's Services Taskforce in the management of Covid within their settings. This work has increased over the past week, and we will continue to do all that we can to support Head Teachers who are facing an incredibly challenging term. The vaccination programme of 12–15-year-olds within schools is underway and whilst the responsibility for the programme is with Central Government, we are working to support schools, particularly with the anti-vaccination messages that they are receiving. I am reliably told that our teenagers are doing a remarkable job in masking and being vaccinated. So, thank you all if anybody is on this call.

Covid marshals are providing support to schools on the day of vaccination, as well as offering reactive support should it be needed. In addition, marshals are proactively walking routes to our secondary schools to look for any anti-vaccination communication or activity. The Children's Services taskforce are collating questions and concerns from the parent community and school which will shape any further communication and support.

Finally, we are working closely with our colleagues in the CCG and in primary care as the Covid booster programme begins to be rolled out to the 60,000 residents that are eligible.

Therefore Covid 19 is far from over and we continue to step up and play our part in responding to the pandemic, working closely with our Health partners and the voluntary sector as we do this. My message to you remains consistent; please follow Public Health advice, be considerate of others and please do take up your vaccinations and encourage others to do so.

This Council has taken its financial management responsibilities very seriously over many years which is why, unlike others, we have been able to fund vital additional support to our community throughout this awful period in our history. We want to also be able to provide valuable support to our community in the future, both in the context of our response to the pandemic and enabling our community to recover as best it can.

However, it is important we recognise that we face yet another financial precipice to navigate: We have the long-term impact of Covid-19 meaning there is a greater need for local authority support. We must ensure we find funds to enable the delivery of our Recovery Strategy. We are facing significant inflationary pressures impacting on our services and Capital programme ambitions, these include gas prices and the cost of building materials, and probably most significantly, we have a potential multi-million-pound burden following the recent NHS and Social Care announcements. Many of these pressures are already upon us and others will be taking their toll over the coming years. We cannot afford to take our hands off the financial tiller and must continue to collectively steer our way through turbulent and challenging times. I have no doubt we have the right calibre of personnel and officers on board to do this with great effect.

Up ahead is one of the most significant Local Government Finance Settlements this Council has faced in a very long time. It will determine the grant funding we have to deal with our challenges over, I suspect, the next three years. It is essential we get a fair deal for this Council and our residents. I and my Executive will do everything in our power to press home the case for Wokingham. I am just grateful that my contact with Government and MPs is so very good. Regrettably I cannot determine the outcome of such a national

funding settlement. So, whilst doing all I can to bring pressure to bear to get the funding settlement our residents and our Borough deserve, it remains incumbent on us to relentlessly pursue value for money in all we do and continue to practice the highest standards of financial management in delivering vital services for our community. Therefore, we are reviewing our revenue income and expenditure, and our capital budget, particularly if unsupported.

Whilst I am a strong adherent of maximising the recycling rate, I could not support Shirley Boyt's motion on public waste receptacles as it would place adverse pressure on both our capital and revenue budgets at this critical time. Had we had time we would have proposed an amendment.

We were due to discuss the lease for a proposed new library for Twyford this evening but are now not able to do so. The recent and rapid increase in building costs across the country necessitates pause to consider how we ensure value for money for all our residents. A recent tender exercise for the work required for this project revealed a significant increase of above previously planned and budgeted costs. It is well known that I have personally husbanded this project with my Executive and invested much time and political capital to its realisation, with very little local Member or parish council tangible support. So, it is a real disappointment that we must pause our efforts.

This is simply not the moment to be cavalier with our capital spending. We are beginning to see the consequences of other authorities over-stretching themselves and getting into financial problems and these consequences are not pleasant. We have always been prudent and will continue to be so to safeguard services and quality of life for all residents.

I understand this will be disappointing and want to assure everybody that we remain supportive of the principle of the new library and that this is a pause to allow us time to make the right decision.

I have been very lenient with questions to the Executive and have done my best for them all to be answered. However, I would point out that the total permitted time is twenty minutes.

A questioner who has put a question in person may also put one supplementary question without notice. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original question or the reply and must not introduce any new subject matter. I will reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds in Rule 5.4.37. A supplementary question must not be longer than one minute. If I consider that the questioner is making a statement, I will rule that the questioner be not further heard.

42. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

43. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

43.1 Prue Bray had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question. Due to her inability to attend the following written answer was provided:

Question

At the Executive in July, you gave out the figures for the numbers of houses given planning permission in Hurst, Shinfield, Arborfield and Winnersh between 2010/11 and 2019/20. What are the figures for the number of additional dwellings actually built in each of those Parishes between those dates?

Answer

As explained in my answer of 29 July, the strategy established by the Core Strategy local plan was to meet the majority of our development needs in four major development areas: North Wokingham, South Wokingham, Arborfield Garrison and South of the M4. A remainder of development needs would be met on the edge of our towns and villages.

This approach has enabled significant infrastructure to be provided alongside new homes, helping to mitigate the impacts by providing an opportunity to access local services, facilities, and the need to reduce travel. This approach has enabled us to have the opportunity to retain the character of our towns and villages through actions such as the retention of gardens.

The Core Strategy was prepared in consultation with residents and stakeholders. Views expressed through residents to more recent planning consultations continue to suggest that the preference of residents is to meet the majority of development needs through major development areas.

Turning to the specific request, the number of dwellings built over the ten year period specified across the Borough are as follows:

| Parish | Completions (net) 2010/11 to 2019/20 |
|--------------------------|---|
| Arborfield | 276 |
| Barkham | 255 |
| Charvil | 22 |
| Earley | 138 |
| Finchampstead | 95 |
| Hurst | 24 |
| Remenham | 1 |
| Ruscombe | 53 |
| Shinfield | 1,897 |
| Sonning | 21 |
| Swallowfield | 82 |
| Twyford | 45 |
| Wargrave | 65 |
| Winnersh | 521 |
| Wokingham | 2,900 |
| Wokingham Without | 136 |
| Woodley | 1,195 |

Strategic Development Locations and related parishes:

1. South of the M4 SDL = Shinfield Parish
2. Arborfield Garrison SDL = Arborfield, Barkham and Finchampstead Parishes
3. North Wokingham SDL = Wokingham Town
4. South Wokingham SDL = Wokingham Town and Wokingham Without Parish

43.2 Gary Cowan had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question. Due to his inability to connect the following written answer was provided:

Question

Wayne, I did bring a series of questions concerning ongoing works currently taking place on Gravelpit Hill Lane to the attention of Officers, the Leader and yourself among others going back to early August asking has the Borough Council seen and approved these plans and if so, why has there been no planning Application submitted.

My question is why have I not had a reply to my questions from anyone including yourself within Wokingham Borough Council?

Answer

Between early August and the receipt of the question, the following emails about the engineering works to the dam have been received from Gary Cowan (GC) and responses provided:

| | | |
|--|-----------|-------|
| GC | 3/8/21 | 12.25 |
| FH | 3/8/21 | 17.11 |
| GC | 4/8/21 | 7.45 |
| GC | 4/8/21 | 11.02 |
| GC | 4/8/21 | 11.03 |
| GC | 6/8/21 | 11.19 |
| MC | 6/8/21 | 12.19 |
| GC | 6/8/21 | 12.34 |
| GC | 7/8/21 | 12.18 |
| GC | 8/8/21 | 10.56 |
| GC | 9/8/21 | 10.46 |
| MC | 9/8/21 | 12.02 |
| GC | 9/8/21 | 12.33 |
| MC | 9/8/21 | 12.40 |
| GC | 9/8/21 | 14.52 |
| MC | 10/8/21 | 14.49 |
| GC | 10/8/21 | 16.40 |
| MC | 10/8/21 | 16.55 |
| GC | 10/8/21 | 17.42 |
| GC | 10/8/21 | 19.44 |
| MC | 11/8/21 | 9.02 |
| Question for Executive Member received | 12/8/2021 | |
| GC | 13/8/21 | 12.19 |
| GC | 23/8/21 | 14.12 |
| Susan P | 24/8/21 | 17.13 |

In addition to the above, there has been responses to Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints and the offer of a meeting with Assistant Director Mark Cupit.

There has been a further ongoing email exchange throughout September and a meeting has been arranged on 7 October with Assistant Director Stephen Brown.

43.3 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

Question

I am delighted to see the lease for the new Twyford Library recommended for approval by the Council's Executive. Assuming that the Executive does indeed approve, can the Executive Member give some indication of the timetable for the conversion work and likely date of the opening of the new library?

Answer

I will not go into detail of your proposed first choice of question, obviously that has been pretty well answered.

The Council has an excellent track record of sound financial management and maintaining high quality services for our residents.

The Council will need to consider the financial consequences of this project alongside the other pressures we are facing, so that we can continue to maintain our core objective of protecting the services that our residents rely on.

A key part of the considerations for this project will include discussions with the Polehampton Trust to understand their view on the challenges we face and how this project continues to support their objectives for supporting the people of Twyford, Ruscombe and Charvil.

Supplementary Question

I understand that you cannot answer the original question in terms of the timetable given. This pause, and I hope indeed that it is a pause. John indicated that is just a pause which is good news, I think. Could I ask you that when we do move to the stage of moving to the conversion work, and you are able to consider a likely opening date, could we consider naming part of this new building after the late Dave Turner who was one of the Polehampton Trustees? John would know him very well, and I readily acknowledge the work that John has put into this, but I think we should also recognise Dave Turner's contribution. I am hoping that we might be able to perhaps name one of the rooms in the new library after him in recognition of his considerable efforts on this project.

Supplementary Answer

I also knew Dave Turner very well, and I know the amount of work that he put into this and the work that he did within the Twyford community. It is a consideration that we will take very seriously, and I would like to think that we are able to do that, but obviously that will need to be a consideration taken by Council Members rather than just me. Personally, I would like to see it happen.

43.4 David Hare asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question which was answered by the Deputy Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services in his absence:

Question

May I congratulate the officers in this enterprising paper, support for the preventative service is something I have long advocated. You are increasing the money available to the voluntary services excellently in 2022/3 but the increase in 2023/4 is only £100km that

is 5% or not much more than inflation. As the voluntary sector grows due to more certainty that this funding provides along with increased demand and need will further monies be available to fund new preventative and first step services that are valuable assets to the Council?

Answer

Thank you for supporting this paper on the procurement of voluntary sector adult services. I am pleased to note that we have cross party support as far as I can find, for our approach to the much-valued voluntary sector. The first point to make here is that inflationary increases are dealt with from a separate additional funding stream in the MTFP. The details of this are agreed through an annual inflationary uplift process. This means that the £600K increase over 2 years is in the region of a 30% gross increase against our early intervention and prevention agenda. I think you will agree this is impressive given the pressures on local government and the uncertainty we have in central government funding going forward.

We will of course keep this under review each year through our budget setting process and will be having regular conversations with the Voluntary Sector providers as part of our contract monitoring and management process. Our ambition is that if the new spend successfully helps us manage demand and we can afford it we will of course consider more investment having evaluated any requirements raised by our providers and taking into account our own view of the services in place alongside any changing needs in this sector.

We recognise that funding is a difficult issue for the voluntary sector and that they are dependent on a number of funding streams to support their viability. We cannot and will not ignore the invaluable contribution made by the voluntary sector and we will continue to support them to maximise those external streams which are available to them.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for that answer and certainly, as I have said, it is something that I have advocated for many years, last time I was on the Council as well, not always with success. With regards to new services required by the Council from the voluntary sector, has an investigation been done in areas other than dementia into the gaps in voluntary service that are already offered, and the way new services can be provided by the voluntary sector to enhance the lives of residents?

Supplementary Answer,

Yes, thank you for that David. I think that you will hear in my speech later that there has been quite a big consultation process across the voluntary sector services to understand where they can identify gaps, as well as the ones that we can identify, and to put in place the best options that we have so that we can procure appropriately. That is really at the core of this paper, and supports those procurements on an ongoing basis.

43.5 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions the following question:

Question

I am very pleased to see on the report from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group that you see behaviour change science as a golden thread throughout the CEAP and that the Council will be encouraging public transport and active travel wherever possible. This will be vital in tackling the climate emergency.

What steps will you be taking to limit the number and length of journeys which are taken within the Borough?

Answer

Firstly, I have to say that we do not have the power to limit journeys and I would oppose any move to impose journey limits, quotas or restrictions on any resident. Actually, I am also pleased that we do not have the power to limit civil liberties because that sounds more like some form of totalitarian dictatorship rather a democracy, which for the sake of my children I would defend to my last breath. I am surprised that you used the word limit but for the record your Conservative council wants to help people be more sustainable, not force them to be. Unlike the Lib Dems we will not force people out of their cars. What we will do is support residents in reducing their need to travel. We will also support residents reduce their reliance on travelling by private car, by providing viable alternatives to those that want and are able to use them.

Delivering sustainable living through behaviour change is the single most important thing we can do in the fight against climate change. By engaging with experts in behaviour change and incentivising sustainable living we aim to remove the barriers that currently prevent residents from living the desired behaviours in their everyday lives. That means working with schools, via schemes such as Beat the Street, to get kids walking and cycling to school. It means working with businesses to reduce the expectation of their staff to commute into their workplaces. It means using the Planning Strategy to design communities where people of all ages have the opportunity to access a wide range of services without having to drive. We can remove the need for residents to use their cars without having to limit, restrict or quota their use. So, will I vote to limit car use? No. Will I prevent people from visiting relatives, to go to work or to take their kids to school because of an arbitrary quota or limit? No, I will not, and frankly I am disappointed that you would.

Supplementary Question

I am not quite sure how you have interpreted the question in such a way. Certainly, nobody could or would want to, try to force people, or to impose quotas on them. The Borough as a large employer in Wokingham has it in its gift to support in managing the number of unnecessary journeys which its staff need to take on WBC business. What steps is WBC going to take as an employer to explore the possibilities of hybrid working, to allow those staff who can do so to continue to work from home?

Supplementary Answer

Firstly, the reason why I have interpreted your question the way that I have is that in your question you say what steps will you be taking to limit the number and length of journeys which are taken within the Borough. You have used the word limit and so I have interpreted it as you want to limit the journeys that people are taking.

In terms of the Council as an employer, we already have a hybrid working policy. We had it before Covid, we maintained it during Covid, and we are looking to maintain it post Covid. Actually, as a result of work that has been done on hybrid working by the Council, we have reduced our carbon footprint of vehicles coming in and out of the Council by over 65%. That has been maintained during Covid and since, which is absolutely fantastic. The Shute End offices are not full of officers, again you will have seen that yourself when you come in, you will have seen that for Council meetings, and you could see it tonight if you had been here. We have to lead by example. We have a duty as an employer, but also as a community leader to lead by example. We cannot go to businesses and ask

them to reduce the number of days that they are expecting their staff to go into offices, if we are not offering the same ourselves to our staff, which is what we are doing already.

John Halsall, Leader of the Council:

If I could just be helpful. We have a huge piece of work going on at the moment which is called 'The Workplace Reimagined', which is looking to what we should be like in terms of a Council in the future, and it is a long-range piece of work, which will come to the Executive in the course of time when we know what it looks like.

44. OFFICERS RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Executive considered a report setting out the Officer response to the recommendations from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish following their review of the Wokingham Borough Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Councillor Gregor Murray, Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions, introduced the report and highlighted that the Task and Finish Group had made 25 recommendations, many of which had been agreed by Officers. He provided an update on the implementation of some of the recommendations; work was being undertaken to ease commute related emissions; the Bus Service Improvement Plan was under development; roads not yet built would be reviewed where possible. In addition, a house refit trial was already in place. Revenue from the Barkham Solar farm would be reinvested into further climate initiatives, and a number of behaviour change experts had been invited to pitch ideas which could be implemented across the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the Officers' responses to the recommendations from the Climate Emergency Task and Finish Group, as set out in the report, be approved.

45. PROCUREMENT OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE VOLUNTARY SECTOR SERVICES

The Executive considered a report setting out a procurement business case for Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) Adult Prevention Services.

During his introduction the Deputy Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised that the proposed process would enable the Voluntary Sector to have more stable, long-term funding, whilst allowing the Council to direct providers into areas where there was a need for services.

Councillor Halsall praised the way in which the Voluntary Sector had worked with the Council during the pandemic.

Councillor Kaiser commented that the Voluntary Sector had had a positive input in reducing rough sleepers. He went on to state that the work of the Voluntary Sector should be seen a compliment to the work of the Council and not as a substitute.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the procurement business case for Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) Adult Prevention Services, as attached to the report, be approved;
- 2) the Director of Adult Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services be delegated permission to approve the contract and grant the award.

46. FUTURE PART PROVISION OF REGULATORY SERVICES BY WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

The Executive considered a report seeking approval to enter into an agreement with West Berkshire Council to provide a limited range of regulatory services to the Council, in parallel with the bulk of regulatory services that were due to be delivered in-house.

Whilst introducing the report the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities clarified the services that would be provided by West Berkshire Council which included regional and national capability for trading standards, food standards, air quality and animal welfare. In addition, West Berkshire's regulatory proceeds of crime and enforcement case preparation to support these functions would be retained.

Councillor Soane went on to highlight the benefits of having the anti-social behaviour service, back in house.

Councillor Halsall clarified that all services would be brought back in house but that some services would then be sub-contracted back to West Berkshire Council, whilst the Council retained authority. He went on to clarify that the measurement of air quality would be undertaken by West Berkshire Council but not the mitigation measures.

A cross party Task and Finish Group would look at policy issues for the different elements of legislation.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) an agreement be entered into with West Berkshire District Council for the provision of certain regulatory functions under s113 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as set out in the report), from 1 April 2022 until 8 January 2027; and
- 2) the Director of Place and Growth and the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer), in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Housing, be delegated the agreement of the final terms with West Berkshire and completion of the agreement.

47. TWYFORD LIBRARY LEASE

This item was withdrawn.

48. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY 2021

The Executive considered a report setting out a draft Housing Allocations Policy for consultation.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing sought approval to consult on the draft Housing Allocations Policy 2021. The consultation would ask responders to give their views on how social housing was allocated across the Borough, and would last 6 weeks. The Council's Housing Allocation Policy was last updated over 6 years ago.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the draft policy be agreed to go out to consultation. The proposed external consultation period is six weeks;

- 2) the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Finance and Housing, be delegated authority to adopt and implement the Housing Allocations Policy following consultation.

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