



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

24 NOVEMBER 2021 to 15 DECEMBER 2021

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 12 January 2022



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

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

Enriching Lives

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

Safe, Strong, Communities

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

A Clean and Green Borough

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

Right Homes, Right Places

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

Keeping the Borough Moving

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

Changing the Way We Work for You

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

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.33 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, Phil Cunnington, Paul Fishwick, Clive Jones and Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman)

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities)

Officers Present

Christine Bennett (Interim Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development), Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist - Place Clienting), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director, Delivery & Infrastructure), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources & Assets)), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director - Highways and Transport), Marcia Head (Service Manager, Place and Growth), Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green & Blue Infrastructure), Steve Moore (Interim Director - Place & Growth), Emma Pilgrim (Specialist - Place Clienting), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change) and Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

48. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

49. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 October 2021, and the Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee held on 3 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following points of clarification and minor amendments.

6 October 2021

- Had MPs and Government Ministers been contacted regarding a fair funding settlement for Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)? Response – John Redwood, Theresa May and James Sunderland had been contacted, and a letter was being drafted with regards to adult social care funding. The Borough's MPs had also spoken to Ministers including Michael Gove, and further representations were being made.
- Were the proposed bids not inclusive of any potential costs relating to materials or labour? Response – The proposed bids were a 'lockdown one' version, which was consistent with the original summary presented to the Committee in July. Any changes as a result of the Local Government Finance Settlement would be taken back to the Committee at a later date.
- Agenda page 12, bullet point 7 should read "Had meaningful discussions taken place with the police with regards to antisocial behaviour, and the move of this aspect of the service back in-house? Officer response – Discussions ~~had been had with the police since the beginning of this process~~ **with the police were beginning to take place**, and discussions had also taken place with the Community Safety Partnership...."

3 November 2021

- Addition of the following comment into minute item 45 “Members commented that the inclusion of the full report reviewing the BME Forum would have been invaluable to aid the scrutiny of this item.”
- Addition to minute item 46 as follows “The financial consequences if the Government’s Adult Social Care reforms were unknown until the white paper was published early 2022, **however the financial implications on WBC could total £20m.**”
- More detail regarding the impacts on WBC regarding the delay of the special educational needs school in Winnersh would be sought. It was commented that the DfE had been overoptimistic regarding delivery of this project, as now the project would not be delivered until at least Easter 2022. The DfE would assess costs and WBC would submit alternate arrangements and associated costs to the DfE for recompense.
- Addition to the final bullet point of minute item 46 as follows: “The Executive Member, Director, and all staff within the service were thanked for all of their hard work in retaining staff and keeping social workers with the same children. **Special thanks were extended to Carol Cammiss for all of her hard work and effort as the Director of Children’s Services since 2018, and the Committee extended their best wishes to her as she moved on to work at a different Local Authority.**”

50. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

52. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

53. VEGETATION MAINTENANCE

The Committee considered a presentation, set out in agenda pages 25 to 30, which gave an update on vegetation maintenance in the Borough.

The presentation outlined the different maintenance contracts, primarily the ground maintenance contract with Tovali Group Ltd, the highways reactive maintenance contract with Volker Highways, and the street cleansing contract with Volker Highways which was sub-contracted to Urbaser Ltd. The clienting model was under review, whilst the highways contract had been realigned. The next steps for these contracts included an improved reporting system and integration, map accessibility for residents, and a dedicated officer to be focussed on grounds maintenance and street cleansing.

Richard Bisset (Lead Specialist, Place Clienting), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place & Growth), and Emma Pilgrim (Specialist – Place Clienting) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

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

- What more could be done to clarify which areas were deliberately designated as wilding areas, and which were in need of maintenance? Officer response – Officers were working with the Trees and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group to develop a clear plan to allow residents to know which areas were designated for wilding, and which were not.
- Could a page be placed on the Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) website or within the Borough News which outlined kerbside maintenance schedules? Officer response – Officers agreed that this was an issue for residents, and the past year had seen difficulties with weed spraying and officers were adjusting the timings for next year to prevent as many issues regarding this.
- Members commented that clearing the growth on the side of carriageways prior to the growing season commencing could help with some of the recurring issues associated with weed growth.
- Was the page on the website detailing when a road had been cleaned automatically updated, rather than manually updated by an officer once it was confirmed that the cleaning had taken place? Executive Member and officer response – Yes, the page updated on the day of the scheduled clean to state that the clean had taken place. Street cleaning was a very important issue, and if soil and debris were not swept up quickly it would lead to germination and the spread of weeds. The contract in place was of high quality, and the team was doing great work to reduce the likelihood of vegetation occurring in the first place. It could be that telling residents about the expected frequency of cleansing particular roads rather than naming specific dates would be more useful for all parties.
- Could vegetation maintenance become more proactive so that some sites would not be required to be repeatedly reported, and instead added to a schedule for maintenance? Officer response – Historically there had been issues with mapping highway hedges, which was now being proactively worked on to programme works over the winter period. Sites which had been reported over the past, including cycle ways, would be maintained over the winter period to reduce issues within the growing season. An aspect of reactive work was still expected in the summer due to the levels of growth experienced, however officers wanted to do as much works as possible during the winter period outside of the bird nesting season to prevent reoccurring issues where possible.
- It was commented that cycleway maintenance should be a priority to ensure that cyclists had enough room to use the routes safely.
- How were highway inspections and the enforcement of private hedges under the Highways Act 1980 processed by the highway inspection team? Officer response – When a report came in and was identified as private vegetation, the contractor would investigate and send a letter out to the resident. Should no improvement be received, this would be passed on to the highways asset team who could enforce if required.
- Did highway inspectors pick up on any issues with WBC vegetation and feed-back for processing? Officer response – If highways inspectors identified vegetation in need of maintenance as being WBC owned, works would be issued to the grounds maintenance contractors to cut back the vegetation.

- What did place clienting mean? Interim Director response – This encompassed contract management, compliance issues, and looked at where the service could be made more efficient and where improvements could be made.
- If a resident raised a request for private vegetation, however the occupier of the property was a tenant and not the owner, how would the request be processed? Officer response – A letter would be sent to the property regardless of whether it was rented accommodation or not, and if the owner did not respond then ultimately WBC would make direct contact with the owner. In a small number of cases once communications had been exhausted, WBC would eventually carry out the works to the private vegetation and then invoice the owner of the property for the works.
- Were there any plans to change the types of herbicide used to be more environmentally friendly and to encourage biodiversity? Interim Director response – This would be a decision for Members, as a number of authorities who had moved away from herbicide use had returned to the use of herbicides due to the numbers of complaints received. This was a budgetary issue as much as an environmental issue, as many alternative methods would incur substantial additional costs.
- What was being done to link up the two separate reporting systems? Officer response – Officers were working with IT to link the two systems, which should be completed by April 2022.
- What was environmental localities? Officer response – This was the enforcement team which dealt with issues such as fly tipping. In order to continue to improve the customer journey, two additional contract monitoring officers were proposed to be employed to increase the proactivity of the service.
- Had contract monitoring officers been employed within the service in the past? Officer response – This aspect had previously been carried out by the environmental localities team, however priorities had shifted during the pandemic.
- What were the typical Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for carrying out maintenance? Officer response – SLAs differed between street cleansing and grounds maintenance, and street maintenance varied between roads dependent on their usage. Grounds maintenance varied dependent on the priority of each area. Officers were committed to get the right services in the right areas.
- If an issue was not reported, how might this be picked up? Director response – There was a proactive schedule in place, which was being enhanced by GIS mapping. Officers did not want to rely only on reports, and more resources and equipment had been given to the contract for next year to try and stay ahead of many issues.
- Could residents be given additional garden waste bags where they went out of their way to trim WBC vegetation? Officer response – Officers supported community minded individuals, however it would be difficult to offer additional bags as it would be hard to ascertain where vegetation waste originated from. Where officers were informed of a community event taking place a collection service could be organised.
- Whose responsibility was it to collect leaf fall in residential gardens from WBC trees? Officer response – It was not the responsibility of a tree owner to clear leaf fall from

neighbouring properties. Residents had the right to cut back trees to their property boundary, bearing in mind any tree preservation orders.

- Did reports from the “Fix my street” app come through to WBC, did residents receive an incident number, and was an in-house app for WBC in the works? Officer response – Reports from “Fix my street” came through to the customer service teams, and then sent to the relevant service area. This process was a bit slower than direct reports to WBC, and the customer was not always re-contacted. Officers would speak with IMT with regards to any plans for an in-house app.
- What did the team need from Members and residents in order to receive more data? Officer response – Officers would encourage any Borough resident to report issues when they were noticed, to build a bigger pool of data.
- Members requested that the service return during the growing season to assess progress made, and to review the streamlining of the reporting system.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Richard Bisset, Andy Glencross, Steve Moore, and Emma Pilgrim be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Officers explore the possibility of developing a WBC app for reporting vegetation and street cleansing issues;
- 3) The service return to update the Committee in the growing season of 2022 to assess progress made, and to review the streamlining of the reporting system.

54. MTFP 2022-25 - COMMUNITIES, INSIGHT & CHANGE; RESOURCES & ASSETS; AND PLACE & GROWTH PROPOSED CAPITAL AND REVENUE BIDS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 31 to 168, which set out the revenue and capital bids for the Directorates encompassing Communities, Insight and Change, Place and Growth, and Resources and Assets.

Due to time constraints, the Committee only considered the proposed revenue and capital bids for the Place and Growth Directorate. The proposed bids for the remaining Directorates would be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), Pauline Jorgensen (Executive Member for Highways and Transport), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Wayne Smith (Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement), Bill Soane (Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets), Steve Moore (Interim Director – Place and Growth), Mark Cupit (Assistant Director, Delivery & Infrastructure), Andy Glencross (Assistant Director – Highways), Richard Bisset (Senior Specialist – Place Clienting), Marcia Head (Service Manager – Place and Growth), and Francesca Hobson (Service Manager – Community, Heritage, Green and Blue Infrastructure) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

It was noted that many of the bids were returning bids from previous years' Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) versions.

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

- In relation to PG R1, optimise parking income, a Member expressed disappointment that the proposed increase of parking charges and benchmarking from other Councils were not included within the agenda pack.
- In relation to PG R1, optimise parking income, were there registered risks in case the budgeted income was not achieved? Executive Member and Interim Director response – Parking income was slowly recovering, with footfall back to normal levels within the town centres, however car parking was yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. The Denmark Street car park was now larger, and therefore there was potential for additional income from that car park. It was extremely difficult to forecast parking revenue, and supplementary estimates would be taken back to the Executive if required. The general fund balance included a comprehensive risk analysis, and would be available if necessary to cover any shortfall.
- What was the timeframe for the parking revenue recovery plan, and would there be an opportunity to scrutinise this plan once it was ready? Officer response – This was part of a wider piece of work which was being prepared and was hoped to be completed by the middle of 2022, and there were currently no envisaged issues with the plan being reviewed by the Committee when appropriate.
- In relation to PG R3, additional civil parking enforcement operatives, would the additional resource remain only on-street to tackle road safety issues, and how had the predicted additional income been calculated? Executive Member response – Civil parking enforcement was a cost neutral service of which income was ring-fenced. The additional resource would be used to target problem areas across the Borough. The predicted income was assessed on the current civil parking enforcement officers' work.
- In relation to PG R4, income from park and ride sites, did the predicted income include any predicted income from the Thames Valley Park and Ride? Executive Member response – The Thames Valley Park and Ride was going to be used to supplement the Winnersh Park and Ride during the extension of the Winnersh Park and Ride. Opportunities were being explored in relation to improve the park and ride usage and network via different usage of buses.
- Where would additional civil parking enforcement operatives be deployed? Executive Member and Interim Director response – The additional operatives would be deployed in a variety of problem areas around the Borough including specific schools. Operatives were deployed in areas where the local community had asked for support, and these were mostly areas where there were safety issues.
- In relation to PG R4, what was the predicted income of each park and ride site? Officer response – Robust estimates had been used including an element of expected recovery of the park and ride sites from the pandemic, and the current estimates predicted the park and ride sites to be cost neutral. A more detailed answer would be provided in writing.
- When considering PG R1 and R4 together, car parking income and park and ride income, additional income was expected to be at the level of £1.1m over three years. Was this achievable? Interim Director response – Parking income had near enough recovered to pre-pandemic levels, and the town centre income had recovered very

well. The proposed bids were working on the data available currently. In addition, three new park and ride sites were due to open which would provide part of this additional income.

- Had the previously suggested idea of allowing monthly payment for the garden waste bin been considered, to encourage more residents to recycle? Executive Member and officer response – The demand for garden waste bins had increased across the Borough from residents with a wide variety of different backgrounds. Officers would look at the possibility of a monthly charge option, for example via direct debit.
- In relation to PG R5 and R6, increase in cost of garden waste bins and increased recycling capture rate, had potential delays been factored into the predicted income? Executive Member response – Existing customers would see the increased charges from 1st June 2022, whilst new customers would pay the increased price from April 2022.
- Had a small discount to provision of a second bin for garden waste been considered? Interim Director and officer response – This option could be explored by officers, however the existing charge of £70 included collection and disposal of materials, and was benchmarked across the area.
- Had benchmarking of garden waste collection been benchmarked across the Berkshire Authorities as well as Hart Council? Officer response – Local benchmarking had been carried out with neighbouring authorities. Bracknell and Reading charged slightly less than Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), however they had a smaller number of vehicles going out and less operating costs. The charges for Bracknell and Reading would be sought for Members.
- In relation to PG R6, food waste diversion and increased recycling capture, what were the low performing areas, and was the £350k saving achievable? Interim Director and officer response – Some streets and neighbourhoods were not participating as fully as others, and uptake needed to be as high as possible. Those areas which were not participating as fully were being mapped and given extra support to encourage participation. There were potential savings of £1m per annum via encouraging residents to move food waste from blue bags to food caddies, and therefore the proposed saving of £350k per annum was very realistic.
- Would communications relating to which items should be recycled and how be circulated in a number of different languages to include as many residents as possible? Officer response – This was an equalities and accessibility issue, and this was a key point which would be looked at via some of the funding that had been secured from an outside organisation.
- Could a breakdown be provided for PG R10, meeting operating costs of park and ride sites? Executive Member response – This would be provided as a written answer.
- Members commented that it was very positive to see additional posts being bid for within the traffic management team.
- It was noted that PG R12, permanent staffing for Development Management and Enforcement Team, and PG R27, temporary staffing for Development Management

and Enforcement Team, should be considered together. In future, bids such as this would have a note referencing their accompanying bid.

- In relation to PG R13, re-grading of existing posts within Development Management and Enforcement, how close were WBC graduate salaries compared to competing Local Authorities such as Hillingdon? Officer response – Graduates started on Grade 6, approximately £25,000, and could move up to a maximum salary of £32,910 at the top of Grade 7. Other Local Authorities were being closely monitored, and it may be that next year a bid may be put in to increase the potential career grade to Grade 8, as a lot of time and effort was put in to training up staff and WBC did not want them to walk away once they hit their career grade ceiling.
- In relation to PG R12, permanent staffing for Development Management and Enforcement Team, was demand for pre-planning advice and planning applications expected to continue to rise? Executive Member response – Pre planning, planning, and commercial planning applications had risen unexpectedly last year, and there had been a further upturn this year. The data was not suggesting that this trend would slow down or reverse for the time being.
- In relation to bid PG R19, Community Safety, what was the additional funding going towards? Interim Director response – This would go towards 1.5 full time equivalent staffing to deliver the community safety action plan.
- In relation to PG R20, temporary accommodation, was the £350k sufficient considering the red RAG status? Executive Member response – A commitment had been made to keep homeless off of the Borough's streets. Should the proposed funding not be sufficient, officers could bring supplementary estimates for consideration.
- In relation to PG R21, Local Transport Plan 4 and Delivery Plan, could the plan be adapted in future? Executive Member and Interim Director response – This plan was kept in line with the Local Plan Update, and the best practice was to review both plans every five years.
- It was noted that the both PG R23 and PG R25, enforcement and planning appeals, should be read together.
- It was noted that the supporting evidence for PG R26 should be updated in future as it was currently a hyperlink, and the briefing note would be provided to the Committee.
- In relation to PG R23, development management appeals, what was WBC's position regarding the five year land supply? Executive Member response – WBC was still at 5.23 years of land supply, however reserve sites would have to be considered should this level be reduced further. The consultation for the updated Local Plan had been launched, which would address the issue of land supply within the Borough once a new Local Plan had been agreed.
- To help with comparison in relation to PG R23 and PG R25, appeals and enforcement, how many enforcement notices had been issued this year? Officer response – Nine notices had been served this year, and six more were likely before the end of the financial year. Most cases ended up at an appeal and a public enquiry.

- With regards to the bid for an ecology officer (note: this bid was under the £50k limit for an associated bid sheet), could additional details be given regarding this proposed post? Officer response – This was a special item for an additional officer to support the existing team and to respond to the Environment Bill over the next few years. Grant funding was likely to arrive for this post in future, however this bid would provide the immediate funding required to pay for the proposed post.
- In relation to PG R30, reintegration of the Public Protection Partnership, did this expenditure include any “divorce” settlement? Executive Member response – This bid did not include any such figures, which would hopefully be known in December. Currently, many staff had transferred over to WBC and the process was taking place smoothly. If an update on this figure materialised, this could be updated at the January meeting of the Committee.
- In relation to the managing congestion bid (note: this bid was a carryover from the previously agreed MTFP), had the spending been reduced? Officer response – This was a re-profiling as the initial expected pace of expenditure had changed. The overall spend (£20m) had not changed, however it would now be spread out over a longer period of time.
- In relation to PG C1, structural maintenance, with the expenditure remaining equal each year, would this result in less works being carried out due to rising costs? Executive Member and officer response – The budget for road repairs was split amongst several different areas. Additional funding, including Government funding, had been added to the overall budget, and there was no intention to reduce the overall maintenance budget.
- In relation to the previous bid for the highways infrastructure flood alleviation schemes (note: this was an agreed bid from a previous year), was this in relation to a specific scheme or a number of schemes? Officer response – The main amount of this funding was going towards reducing flooding at the Showcase roundabout, and a scheme was being developed south of the M4 to reduce flood risk on Lower Earley Way and the Showcase roundabout.
- In relation to PG C2, Earley station footbridge replacement, did this include an option for lifts at the footbridge and access to the London bound carriageway? Officer response – Currently the bid did not include a ramp to the London bound carriageway. Lifts had not been costed yet, and when the project reached that stage then this would be looked at.
- In relation to PG C8, A327 cycleway, why was the project requiring an additional £400k funding up to a total project cost of £1m? Officer response – More detail would be provided in writing.
- In relation to PG C6, local cycling and walking infrastructure plans (LCWIP), what would happen once the funding ceased? Executive Member and officer response – The funding from Central Government was uncertain, and this bid covered WBC for two years’ worth of delivery, and additional bids for year three could be expected in the future.
- It was agreed that the list of capital projects that included cycling and walking infrastructure investment would be circulated to the Committee.

- Did WBC make money from electric vehicle charging within the Borough? Executive Member and officer response – A commercial agreement was arranged with operators to achieve a cost neutral service, and possibly to generate income.
- In relation to PG C7, electric vehicle charging points, how many additional charging points would this funding provide? Officer response – This was a very immature market, and a pilot project was underway to provide around 70 charging points for approximately £240k of funding. The market may change in future years which could reduce costs.
- Were there different costs between “slow” and “fast” electric vehicle charging points? Officer response – The power supply used for on-street supplies usually came from lamp posts, and as a result these tended to be slower “trickle” charges. The infrastructure would require an overhaul to facilitate faster on-street charging.
- Had Scottish and Southern Electric been approached to ensure the additional 70 electric vehicle charging points could be facilitated? Officer response – The National Grid had presented to officers a year ago, and they were confident that the network could cope with “trickle” charging, and it was adoption of “fast” charging that could present an issue.
- What was SCAPE? Executive Member and officer response – This was the funding to deliver the major SDL roads.
- In relation to PG C17, greenways, why was the programme changing significantly? Officer response – One of the main routes planned for this project had been required to change due to resident feedback, despite previous consultations not indicating any such issues. The scheme would be delayed until further conversations had taken place with residents and the residents’ association, and amended plans could be taken forward.
- In relation to PG C19, feasibility case for developing new crematorium, what was the status of this? Executive Member response – A number of capital projects may be removed in future iterations of the bid process due to costings. Should this be the case, an explanation would be provided at the time.
- In relation to PG C14, Civica system, could more detail be provided with regards to this? Interim Director response – This was the IT software required for the new WBC enforcement safety colleagues including tablets and remote access software.
- In relation to PG C18, sports provision to serve North and South Wokingham SDLs, had thought been given to the types of facilities to be included? Officer response – Originally an outdoor only facility was considered, however indoor use was now also being considered. Much of the work of the newly recruited master planners would be to assess the requirements of the communities which would be served by these facilities.
- Why was the public rights of way network seeing significant change (note: this was not included within this years’ bid sheets)? Officer response – This was funding for the Loddon long distance path, which would run from Swallowfield up to the north of the Borough parallel to the River Loddon. The issue was that some of the land required

was privately owned, and therefore the permission of the landowners was required. Some serious issues in terms of landowner negotiations had been realised, and officers were working towards solutions and hoped to progress this within the coming year.

At this point in the meeting, a motion was proposed, seconded, and carried to extend the meeting to a maximum finish time of 11pm.

At this point of the meeting, it was agreed to defer the remaining directorates to the meeting of the Committee on 13 December 2021. It was suggested by a Member that points of clarification be sent to officers in advance to alleviate time constraints on the evening.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Graham Ebers, Steve Moore, Mark Cupit, Andy Glencross , Richard Bisset, Marcia Head, and Francesca Hobson be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) The remaining two directorates capital and revenue bids be considered at the December meeting of the Committee, and Executive Members and officers associated with these directorates be thanked for their patience at this meeting;
- 3) A written answer be provided with regards to the income projected for each park and ride site, and the associated operating costs of each site;
- 4) Officers explore the option of offering green waste bins on a monthly payment model, splitting costs over a calendar year;
- 5) The Committee be provided with the charges for green waste collection services from both Bracknell Forest Council and Reading Borough Council;
- 6) The briefing note relating to PG R26, increase in planning application fee income, be circulated to the Committee;
- 7) Information be sought with regards to the project cost increase for the A327 cycleway;
- 8) The list of capital projects within the proposed capital programme relating to walking and cycling infrastructure be provided to the Committee.

55. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 169 to 172.

It was noted that the agenda for the January 2022 Committee meeting may be required to be shortened to allow time to consider any changes to budgetary proposals following the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement at the end of 2021.

It was noted that a potential additional meeting in February 2022 may be required to consider upcoming items.

RESOLVED That the work programme be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser, Graham Howe, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Pauline Jorgensen, Highways and Transport
Rachel Bishop-Firth
Laura Blumenthal
Gary Cowan
Jim Frewin
Morag Malvern

65. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Gregor Murray.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen was unable to attend the meeting in person but took part virtually.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency, attended on behalf of Councillor Murray. In accordance with legislation Councillor Blumenthal could speak on any item but was not allowed to vote.

66. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 28 October 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive held on 12 November 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Leader.

67. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Executive Members declared general personal interests in the items on the agenda:

- Councillors John Halsall and John Kaiser on the grounds that they were Non-Executive Directors of Optalis Holdings Ltd;
- Councillors John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith on the grounds that they were Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd.

68. LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

Covid is still prevalent amongst our community and although its serious impact on individuals has considerably been reduced because of vaccinations and boosters.

It is still life threatening to some, and illnesses from the virus compounds the severe pressures faced by our hospitals and care facilities particularly at this time of the year. I continue to urge you to take the usual careful measures to minimise the spread of the virus. Please take up your vaccinations and boosters and encourage others to do as well.

Whilst continuing to deal with the Covid response we are also working hard on our recovery, focusing on those things we need to build upon to be a better Council and enable a more thriving community. Two key themes of work in this regard are equalities and anti-poverty.

We already have an Equalities Strategy with a cross-party working group in place to drive this forward. We are developing a Residents' Equalities Forum as a key part of this ongoing work and want this Forum to represent all protected characteristics. This includes: gender, race and disability, amongst the others.

At Council last Thursday we were clear in our position that we fully support the principles and messages conveyed by the White Ribbon movement. We are, in fact, pursuing what could be called 'White Ribbon Plus' in that we are committed to creating a community where everybody is safe and to promoting equality, inclusion, and a safe community for all. So, whilst today's focus is about tackling violence against women and girls, and that is absolutely right, as the authority responsible for all community safety, our overarching focus must be wider.

Our work on anti-poverty is equally important and also driven by a cross-party working group. We have already established a Hardship Alliance and a broader Voluntary Community Sector Consultation Group led by our extremely capable Chief Executive at the Wokingham CAB, Jake Morrison.

In collaboration with the VCS, and in consultation more broadly with the public, we will create an initial Anti-Poverty Strategy for consideration by the Executive in March and we will seek to develop our actions following this.

We are not, of course, waiting for a strategy before acting as we know there are issues of financial hardship that require an urgent response.

We have enacted numerous schemes and interventions in this regard over the past 18 months, the most recent being the allocation of the Household Support Scheme. This will focus on the continued provision on free school meals as well as targeted contributions to those most in need, utilising the intelligence of our highly valued VCS.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voluntary and community sector for the great work that you do and reinforce my commitment to keep working with you in a genuinely collaborative way.

Last week we brought forward the Local Plan Update Consultation. It will run until 24th January 2022. We would like as many of our residents to reply to the consultation as possible. Please use one of the accredited methods. Online at engage.wokingham.gov.uk, email LPU@wokingham.gov.uk or just send a letter to the Growth and Delivery Team at Shute End. Petitions and Facebook posts cannot be considered but every reply in one of the three channels will be taken into account and published.

Please respond to what is in the plan not what you read or hear elsewhere.

I would happily not build in Wokingham anywhere as I believe that Wokingham has taken its fair share. However, all the political parties nationally agree that 300,000 plus, in both the Lib Dem and Tory manifestos, should be built. There are very, very, few brownfield sites in this Borough.

Wokingham Borough is bounded by areas of natural beauty, green belt and royal lands. Practically the whole of the undeveloped Borough is optioned by some developer. If we do not have a Local Plan which has been subject to inspection, any developer can gain planning permission. The net result would be several times the development required by the housing numbers and the planning in the Borough would be directed by central Government. South Oxfordshire has found this to its cost.

The housing numbers were not “derived in February 2016 by a group of people none of us know who”. They are derived from the National Planning Policy framework and guidance from published statistics. We have taken advice from the best to ensure that these figures are at a minimum. Whilst we cannot justify “exceptional circumstances”, it is pleasing that the campaign I led to change the proposals, which would have taken our housing numbers to over 1,635, was successful.

We have the opportunity of knitting this Local Plan to our climate change and biodiversity agenda. It is dependent on central Government bringing building regulations into line with its climate change and biodiversity objectives.

The Council’s objective is to square the circle between development, climate change and biodiversity. It is a tough objective, but it must be doable.

There has been a lot of scaremongering regarding Pinewood. To be clear we are not proposing to remove any of the valued community groups from the site. The consultation does not plan any development in Pinewood, notwithstanding the claim that it plans to concrete it over. The consultation asks what the organisations within it would consider to fund these organisations’ stated need for considerable investment.

The winter is now upon us. Due to the old and poor state of repair of the utilities and the pressure placed upon them, we will unfortunately see more failures. This will bring more problems on the roads. The demand for broadband with people working from home has exacerbated the issues on the roads. The Council will do all in its power to ensure that the disruption is kept to a minimum, but we can’t have people without lights, gas, water and Internet connections. They are now all essential to our way of life. Utility companies must deal with emergencies. The Council cannot intervene. We can delay maintenance to ease problems. We all use the roads and understand the frustration and delays caused on the Borough roads. We will do all we can to keep them to the minimum.

69. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

70. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

As part of Wokingham’s planning process, statutory conditions are placed on approved development to plant trees and the usual intention of the condition is that should any trees that did not survive within, I believe five years must be replaced. Wokingham BC Planning

Department will have a full record of the numbers of trees approved by planning conditions.

Professional experts indicate that 25% of new trees planted die and those that survive need attention. As monitoring conditions is a statutory function, I assume the Planning Department have a record of how many of the new planted trees by condition did not survive.

My question is; can the Council provide a complete written record of how many new trees approved by planning conditions over the past five years that have not survived and have they all been replaced?

Answer

Planning enforcement is entirely a discretionary activity for local government. However, the Council's Compliance Team Officers and the landscape architects do carry out regular landscape audits of new developments to check the survival of the newly planted trees. Those that have not survived are referred to the developers whose responsibility it is to replace any failed trees as you indicate, and we will follow up on that request to ensure replacement planting is carried out.

The landscape audits are a useful activity to identify trees on new developments that require replacing. However, Officers are always grateful to the public where they can report any dead or dying trees that they notice, so that we can then report those back to the developer for replacement. Officers also work very closely with the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association volunteers who are extremely helpful in reporting problems with trees on new developments. Whilst we do not maintain a record of the number of trees concerned the compliance activity is a discretionary activity which we recognise as extremely important from a placemaking and ecological perspective.

I hope that helps?

Supplementary Question

Not really. If the experts say 25% are lost, then we should have records that 25% have been replaced.

Research does show that hundreds of imposed planning conditions are not followed up which undermines the Planning Committee's best intentions and although it may not be a statutory role would the Executive Member agree with me that Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Department has serious problems in following up on conditions?

What I would ask is that the excellent work akin to that commissioned by Councillor John Kaiser on enforcement, which was a big success some years ago, could a similar one now not be carried out on the Planning Department?

Supplementary Answer

Gary, I do not agree with you because when I first took over the Executive role I increased the number of Enforcement Officers. I am also doing the same in Fran Hopson's area and I have brought an extra revenue bid forward for more staff. So, I think that is absolutely rubbish and I am absolutely committed to Planning and if you have got any examples, please let me have them and I will get the Compliance Team round to have a look.

70.2 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement the following question:

Question

Over the past few years Shinfield has been subjected to significant development and a large number of associated planning conditions. Can you please provide a full list of these conditions for the past four years that shows signed off compliance status?

Answer

Shinfield Parish has received 805 planning applications over the past four years, all of which have been subject to numerous planning conditions, the decisions for which are recorded on the Council's website. We do not hold records in the form you request, however the information is available for you to access should you wish to check for yourself. Should you wish to discuss any particular cases please make these known to me and I will ensure, like I did a few weeks ago when I was out with Connor and Fran and we went round most of the sites in your Ward, that they come back with the information you need.

Supplementary Question

Most of the compliance issues I raise I go to Connor with anyway. It is just that it takes so long to actually find an answer that by the time we get there the compliance is not visible. The most annoying one for residents is the working hours compliance which seems to be abused until we give them a reminder. It is then adhered to for at least a week and then it goes back to being abused again. There seems to be no consistency with actually ensuring working hours.

Supplementary Answer

I did see some at the weekend where I know you were copied into some of the pictures that Jackie sent me. I would be quite happy with Connor and myself if you would come along with us and let us go along and see the developers and let us have a joint approach to it.

70.3 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities the following question:

Question

Residents are delighted to see that the building of the Carnival Hub is on track for opening in late summer 2022. Our understanding is that the Carnival Hub facilities will be open on Saturdays, Sundays and evenings, to fit in with the times that residents with weekday work or education commitments will be looking to use them. Can the Council confirm please that the new library will be open on Sundays and also on weekday evenings in line with the opening times for other facilities?

Answer

Usage and opening hours within the library service are reviewed regularly to ensure that services are focussed around the hours where there is most demand, whilst also ensuring we are mindful of adjusting service levels where there is less demand. Overall, this approach has ensured that the service has been in growth against a national back drop of decline, whilst also delivering the service in a financially sustainable way.

To ensure that the library service continues to deliver on its existing success it was reviewed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2021. This included a commitment to develop a new Library Strategy in 2022. Part of this process will be reviewing options to ensure that the service is delivered at places and times when there

is most need within the local community. This review is an important element in ensuring that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligation of providing a comprehensive and efficient library service.

In conclusion we will wait until the revised Strategy is complete before determining whether the Sunday and evening openings are required. But that is not to say that we are not open to any suggestions that would improve the service to our residents.

Supplementary Question

I do hope that it can be open evenings and weekends because there are a lot of young people living in flats around that area that could really do with that as a peaceful place to study.

My supplementary is: when the new hub opens there is great concern in the community that we are going to lose an asset in the old library building because that is going to be developed into flats. Are there any plans to replace that if it is going to be lost as an asset with, for example, youth clubs for young people in the community?

Supplementary Answer

You say we are losing an asset, in fact we are gaining an asset. The library service that we are going to be introducing into the Hub is far superior to the library service that we can offer where we are at the moment. So I do not think that to say we are reducing our facilities is true. I think it is far from it.

No decision has been made as yet as to what will happen with the existing library but I can assure you that the best possible use will be made of it.

70.4 Morag Malvern asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

There is a purpose-built youth centre in Wokingham, on Reading Road, which does not seem to offer any regular youth club sessions. Why not?

Answer

The building known as the Wokingham Youth Centre houses the Integrated Early Help Service, the Council's Early Help offer for children which goes up to the age of 18. This service is responsible for the delivery of a variety of targeted group and 1:1 direct work interventions, aimed at supporting children and families in need of additional help. The work and delivery takes place both on site and in the community and includes: 1:1 sessions with children and parents, parenting programmes and family and network meetings. The service is also responsible for the delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh and Explorers Extreme programmes, where there are groups of youths who undertake their gold, silver and bronze awards. Training sessions take place on site three nights per week.

The Integrated Early Help Service share the site with ARC, the Youth Counselling Service, which your colleague and our colleague Councillor David Hare is well aware of as he has attended the ARC Management Board meetings together with me. ARC is a Council commissioned service, SENDIASS and NEET, all of whom support vulnerable children and youths.

When the building is not being used for the above services, there are a variety of community groups that hire the place. This activity was significantly reduced, as you would

expect due to Covid, however has recently commenced again in line with the updated building risk assessment that is in place.

Given the current use of the site by the Integrated Early Help Service, Council partners and community groups, there is limited capacity to house additional services and activities.

Supplementary Question

How do you feel about providing some outdoor equipment for the older child so that they have got somewhere healthy to hang out and exercise? I do have in mind a recent refurbishment where the new play equipment, although lovely, would appear to be aimed at infant school children. I just wondered how you felt about the older child because some year 6s are really quite hefty?

Supplementary Answer

I don't know the answer to that question, but I am prepared to look at it and certainly happy to talk to you offline.

I have just been reminded that we expect the town councils to do much of that and actually I have to say that also reminds me that in my neck of the woods, in Wargrave, it is Wargrave Parish Council that has put that kit in on the Recreation Ground. Nevertheless, we will take a look at what provision there is and whose responsibility it is. I will do that together with you.

71. INSTALLATION OF ON-STREET RESIDENTIAL AND COUNCIL-OWNED CAR PARK CHARGEPOINTS

The Executive considered a report relating to the installation of EV chargepoints for on-street residential and Council-owned car parks.

The report was introduced by the Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency who went through the recommendations as set out in the report. Councillor Blumenthal highlighted that information obtained from the Department for Transport stated that 80% of all EV charging happened at home. Following a survey of Wokingham residents it was found that 83% of residents, who responded, expressed their preference for charging their EVs most of the time at home where they park overnight. The proposal was all about increasing accessibility and being more inclusive, especially as not everyone had access to off street parking, by increasing the number of public chargepoints in the Borough. It was noted that 75% of the funding would be coming from central Government.

The Executive Member for Highways and Transport explained that there were some limitations as to where EV chargepoints could be positioned on streets as they were dependent on the location of streetlamps for power. If the project was successful it was hoped to instal more in the future.

Councillor Kaiser stated that there was often confusion around plug-in sites and therefore he wanted to ensure that the chargepoints would be easy to use with payment by credit card. Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that the Government had recently announced legislation that would make every EV chargepoint contact-less, force developers to put EV chargers in new homes and also force industrial sites, where major redevelopments had taken place with more than 10 parking spaces, to include EV chargepoints.

Councillor Margetts stated that it was often difficult to find where charging points were located and wanted to ensure that these new chargepoints would be widely publicised.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the initial small-scale rollout of approximately 36 on-street residential EV chargepoints be approved, subject to a local engagement exercise once preferred sites have been identified;
- 2) the provision of EV chargepoints in Council-owned car parks be approved;
- 3) £66,000 of capital borrowing be approved to fund the Council's 25% investment subject to securing the remaining 75% through Government funding; this borrowing will be recovered through revenues generated by the project;
- 4) it be noted that Wokingham Borough Council would be the owner and operator of the EV chargepoints but the maintenance would be undertaken by an external supplier with expertise in this sector. All costs related to maintenance and management will be covered by the external supplier following a procurement exercise;
- 5) it be noted that the award of the contract for supplier will be dependent on achieving the financial estimations detailed within this report, ensuring zero net cost to the Council;
- 6) it be noted that a further report will be presented to the Executive for approval following an initial 18-month period of operation of the on-street chargepoints to review effectiveness and summarise lessons learned to inform into the future EV strategy.

72. RENT SETTING POLICY

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Rent Setting Policy that would ensure that the current annual rent setting process was regularised.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing explained that the Rent Setting Policy will ensure that the Council regularises the current rent setting process and reconfirms that rent setting is part of the annual Housing Revenue Account budget setting process. It was noted that although this was a new policy, that was required in order to adhere to the Rent Standard 2020, it did not involve any changes to the Council's current approach to how rent was charged.

Councillor Kaiser confirmed that the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel had been consulted and they were in support of the policy.

RESOLVED: That the Rent Setting Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, for which the 'Rent Setting Policy' primarily relates to the Housing Revenue Account (2552 properties) plus includes a small number (18 properties) of General Fund properties be approved.

73. THERAPY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Executive considered a report setting out proposals for a joint procurement of an Integrated Children's Therapy Service for Wokingham, in partnership with West Berkshire and Reading local authorities.

The Executive Member for Children's Services highlighted that the Council currently commissioned Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy and Physiotherapy for children and young people with Education Care and Health Plans. In addition, the Council had been exploring opportunities to work collaboratively with Brighter Futures for Children, Reading and West Berkshire Councils to explore a joint commissioning approach for future provision of these services for their local populations. Councillor Howe confirmed that this strategic approach to planning and procuring services in a joined way was a means for local authority partners to deliver value for money, positive outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Following a query by Councillor Kaiser it was confirmed that what was being proposed was not a joint service and Wokingham would be leading on the procurement of the service.

Councillor Blumenthal queried why the Council was going down the joint procurement route and not on its own? Councillor Howe explained that a large number of specialists were involved in the provision of these services, and it would be expensive for the Council to set up and manage the provision on its own. In addition, there was the chance that the Council would end up competing with neighbouring authorities for the services of those specialists. It therefore made sense to collaborate on these specialisms.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a joint procurement exercise for an Integrated Children's Therapy Service for Wokingham be undertaken with West Berkshire and Reading local authorities;
- 2) the three local authorities jointly procure as a single lot resulting in a single contract signed by the supplier and the three local authorities;
- 3) the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children's Services, be delegated authority to award the contract to the successful bidder following completion of the evaluation process. The estimated WBC budget is £389,520 per annum.

74. FARLEY HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CHANGES

The Executive considered a report relating to proposed organisational changes to Farley Hill Primary School.

The Executive Member for Children's Services reminded Members that at the start of this academic year the school had been moved to a new site in Arborfield Green. Unfortunately, some parents living near the school had not been able to meet the school's catchment policy and gain a place for their child. The proposal was to expand the school to 420 places plus a nursery and expand the catchment area so that children living in homes in the immediate proximity of Arborfield Garrison SDL were included. Councillor Howe highlighted the map appended to the report which set out the new catchment area.

Councillor Howe confirmed that the plan was that the former school site in Farley Hill Village would be closed. He also confirmed that it was believed that The Coombes School would not be impacted by the change in the PAN number of Farley Hill Primary School.

Councillor Kaiser, in his role as Ward Member, welcomed this change as he had parents who could see the school but could not secure a place for their children.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) formal consultation be approved on the proposal that the proposals agreed by Executive on 30th January 2020 for the expansion of the Farley Hill Primary School in stages on two sites be replaced by a new proposal that Farley Hill Primary School expands to 420 places (plus a nursery) from September 2022, and that the former school site in Farley Hill Village be formally closed;
- 2) proposed changes to 2022/23 School Admission arrangements to ensure that all children living in homes on or in immediate proximity to the Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location are within the Farley Hill Primary School Designated Area be endorsed;
- 3) authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services, to determine the proposal.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Maria Gee, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant (Chairman), Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman), Abdul Loyes and Ian Shenton

Also Present

Helen Thompson, Ernst and Young
Stephan Van Der Merwe, Ernst & Young
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Catherine Hickman, Lead Specialist, Audit and Investigation
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Matt Pope, Director Adult Services
Mark Thompson, Chief Accountant
Bob Watson, Assistant Director Finance

35. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

36. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 September 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Shahid Younis declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes.

38. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

39. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

**40. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL UPDATE AUDIT PLANNING REPORT
YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021**

The Committee considered the Wokingham Borough Council Update Audit Planning Report Year ended 31 March 2021.

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

- Helen Thompson, EY, confirmed the completion of the audit planning, which had been largely completed at the time of the last committee, apart from value for money.
- In terms of value for money the initial risk assessment against the three reporting criteria, had been completed. No significant risks in relation to the Council's proper arrangements had been identified, therefore no specific work in any particular area was required.
- The commentary which would be provided as part of the Auditor's Annual Report would be presented to the Committee once the audit had been completed.

- There had been a change in the auditing standard around the auditing accounting estimates, which had increased the work required on actuarial models in particular.
- The audit was in progress, and it was anticipated that a report would be presented at the February committee meeting.
- Councillor Shenton questioned whether items subject to accounting estimates included investment or other properties. Helen Thompson commented that the most prominent estimates that were included were around Property, Plant and Equipment valuations and the IAS 19 Pension Liability reported in the Financial Statements. There were other estimates in the financial statements, but not all would be subject to the same level of complexity and judgement.

RESOLVED: That the Wokingham Borough Council Update Audit Planning Report Year ended 31 March 2021 be noted.

41. UPDATE ON 2020/21 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Members were updated on the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts.

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

- Helen Thompson commented that it would have been a challenge to have the audit completed for the committee meeting given that the 2019/20 audit had been signed off in August. Members were informed that the areas of work were well underway. There was work to complete across all areas of the audit, particularly the valuation of Property, Plant and Equipment investment properties and the IAS 19 Pension Liabilities, which would continue into December and January.
- The Assistant Director Finance highlighted that whilst budget setting had commenced early it had run on into the period. The delay in signing the previous accounts had meant a delay in beginning the accounts.
- Members were informed that 91% of local authorities had not met the deadline for signing their accounts. Some had also not signed off their 2019/20 accounts. It was hoped that the signed set of accounts would be brought to the February Committee meeting.
- Councillor Sargeant questioned whether the Committee would review a draft set of accounts before they were signed off. It was noted that a draft set of accounts was published on the website. It was anticipated that the Committee would have early sight of the draft accounts. Helen Thompson added that the accounts needed to come to the Committee in February for approval. The Audit Results Report would help inform it.
- Councillor Sargeant sought an update on where EY and the Council were with regards to valuation work. Helen Thompson stated that they were better progressed at this stage of the audit. Conversations had been had with the valuations team, the sample selected, and information provided from the Council's valuers to the EY team or the EY Real Estate Team which was looking at a number of assets. The Real Estate Team continued to be under pressure.
- Councillor Gee questioned whether the valuation of property and pensions was holding up the audit. Helen Thompson commented that the audit started in October and that there was a lot of work to complete.
- Councillor Gee went on to state that the latest version of the accounts on the website was dated 30 July. The Assistant Director Finance confirmed that this was the version that had been available for inspection by the public.
- Councillor Gee went on to state that the existing version of the accounts stated that adjustments still needed to be made in August 2021 for revaluation of Council

dwelling and approximately 60 other assets. Adjustments were also needed for assets held for sale, including sale of residential properties related to Elms Field redevelopment and one HRA property. Councillor Gee questioned the nature of the adjustments, how much they were, whether they were reducing income and whether they were realised or unrealised. The Assistant Director Finance agreed to provide this information following the meeting. Councillor Gee asked that this include those amounts which would hit the income and expenditure account.

- Councillor Gee sought clarification as to whether realised losses were taken against income available for services. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that it depended on the nature of the loss. If it was a downward valuation, then it would be written through the income and expenditure into a valuation reserve. The revaluation reserve would be brought down to a point where if it went below its original holding value, it was then charged to the income and expenditure account.

RESOLVED: That the update on the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts be noted.

42. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee considered the Corporate Risk Register.

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

- Members praised the presentational changes made to the Corporate Risk Register.
- Since the last report to Committee a risk around 'Health and Social Care reforms' had been added.
- The "IT Infrastructure" and "Telephony" risks had been removed following the successful mitigation of both risks.
- A number of statutory duty risks such as Health and Safety, regulatory inspections and equalities had been amalgamated under one risk "Failure to meet Statutory Duties."
- In response to a request from the Committee, the Director Adult Services outlined the approach to risk taken by the Department and the Department Risk Register. Members were advised that the Departmental Risk Register was discussed at least once a month and regularly reviewed through the departmental leadership team. Those risks which were particularly high were considered by the Corporate Risk group and escalated. Discussions were also had at the Corporate Leadership Team.
- Risk 13 Health and Social Care Reform was an emerging risk. Currently it was predominantly a financial risk to the Council. The Director Adult Services explained that the Government had announced the intention to address the long-term future of Adult Social Care funding. As part of this the Levy had been announced which would generate approximately £12billion a year, however only in the region of £1.8 billion of this was going to Adult Social Care. Changes around the care cap and funding threshold would mean that the gap between what the Council was likely to receive and the additional cost to the Council, was significant, potentially £20million or higher. One of the reasons why it was such a large risk to Wokingham Borough, was the high level of self-funders. Currently the Council supported in the region of 1,700 to 1,800 individuals. This could potentially rise to approximately 5,000. Mitigating actions included conversations with the Government and the MPs around the impact.
- Risk 6 – Failure to meet statutory duties and Risk 14 – Failure to meet statutory duties (Safeguarding Adults) were well mitigated.

- Risk 7 – Adult Social Care Supplier Sustainability – related to the Adult Social Care market. This market was struggling from historic under funding and other factors such as Covid, Brexit and recruitment issues. Capacity could be difficult to secure.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked about the impact of any care workers having to leave their role because they were unvaccinated. The Director of Adult Services explained that Covid vaccinations were mandatory for care workers who went into care homes. This had impacted only small numbers and the viability of the care homes had not been impacted. However, it added to capacity issues in addition to other factors such as under funding and recruitment issues. The care market needed to grow.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey went on to ask about the support of charities which had provided a lot of support to residents during the pandemic. The Director Adult Services commented that in the absence of a long term funding deal for Adult Social Care, it was very difficult to commit to long term funding for charities. Work was being undertaken via the Voluntary Sector Strategy.
- In response to a question from Councillor Loyes, the Director Adult Services emphasised that any financial impact from the Health and Social Care reforms would have a net increase burden on the Council as a whole.
- Councillor Younis stated that the pandemic had increased the impact of mental health issues and pressure on mental health services. He questioned whether this should be reflected in the Corporate Risk Register. The Director Adult Services emphasised that the majority of services for mental health in the Borough, were managed by health. The role of the Council related to people’s social care needs around mental health, and also prevention. An increase in need had been seen following the pandemic, but new services such as the MIND service, had been introduced to help mitigate this. Demand was currently monitored on the Directorate risk register.
- Councillor Gee questioned how long the Adult Social Care precept was anticipated to last and if it was likely to increase. The Levy had been announced but it was not yet clear how it would be used.
- Councillor Sargeant asked whether the change in relationship with Optalis had had an impact on the ability to manage risks. He was informed that the changes had had a positive impact.
- With regards to Risk 12 High Needs Block overspend, Councillor Gee questioned what was meant by ‘Due to the increased demand and costs of SEN education provision there is the risk that the DfE requires repayment of our high needs block overspend of £xm resulting in a significant impact on reserves and budget pressures.’ The Assistant Director Finance explained that the Dedicated School Grant was a ringfenced element from funds received from the Department for Education. Historically it had been insufficient for the level of needs that had to be provided for, and there had been an overspend. Under Government Guidance the Council had been able to build up a deficit of unusable reserves on the accounts. The risk highlighted that any change in policy may mean that the Council would be required to make up the deficit shortfall. The risk was not highly likely at present but would potentially have a large impact should it come about. Councillor Gee questioned what the deficit was currently running at and was informed that it was approximately £4million. Members were reminded that it was reported in the Quarterly Monitoring Reports to the Executive.
- Councillor Younis commented that Risk 12 had been on the Corporate Risk Register for some time. He referred to the mitigating action ‘Discussions with the Education and Skills Funding Agency around additional funding’ and asked how

these discussions were progressing. He was informed that the Council was required to have an action plan in place to slow the increase in the deficit.

- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked what the risk would be should funding not be received for the Winnersh Farm School. The Assistant Director Governance agreed to refer this query to Children's Services and to feed back to the Committee.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey stated that Risk 1 Budget and Financial Resilience remained at a high level. She questioned why this had not reduced. The Assistant Director Governance highlighted the uncertainty around the 3 year settlement which was due to be announced.
- Councillor Gee indicated that she was satisfied with the identification of the risks and some of the controls identified. She expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of movement in some of the risks. With regards to Risk 1, she indicated that the mitigating actions had been unchanged for some time. The Assistant Director Governance commented that with the new presentational style, it was now easier to see the target that was being aimed for. There was an aspiration to reduce the impact and likelihood of risks. Part of the Committee's role was to challenge if the mitigations were correct and provide further suggestions.
- Councillor Shenton referred to the risk relating to Climate Emergency and the complexity of behaviour change. He questioned why more was not being done to promote sustainable transport and walking. The Assistant Director Governance stated that in the presentation of the new risk register, Officers had tried to be clearer as to what the risks were. The Climate Emergency risk was multi-faceted, and Officers would review the risk mitigation actions to ensure that they were appropriate.
- Councillor Ross was of the opinion that Risk 7 could be more clearly worded.
- Councillor Loyes asked how discussions were progressing with Reading Borough Council regarding the Winnersh Farm School. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that he would seek a response from Children's Services.

RESOLVED: That the risks and mitigating actions of the Council's corporate risks as detailed in the attached CRR be noted.

43. TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID - YEAR REPORT 2021-22

The Committee considered the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2021-22.

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

- The Mid Year report was the second of the Treasury Management reports presented to the Committee and on to Council, over the year.
- The Mid Year report was at the 30 September 2021 and gave a summary of where the Council was with its Prudential Indicators and the likely outturn at the end of the financial year in terms of level of debt, level of borrowing, and the return on investments.
- Prudential indicators had been made clearer following previous observations made by the Committee.
- Members were reminded that the report was no longer considered by the Executive but went direct to Council from the Audit Committee.
- Councillor Loyes referred to the less internal funded borrowing under the Council's Net Indebtedness and asked for further information. The Assistant Director Finance commented that at the time of the Outturn Report borrowing had exceeded the capital financing requirement. The Council was working to reverse the level of over borrowing to where the Council was potentially one third internally borrowing funded

and two thirds external funded borrowing. At year end the position was £190million of internal funded borrowing, by repaying elements of debt when receipts had been available to repay it and reducing the level of internal investments.

- In response to a question from Councillor Loyes regarding the difference between the HRA figures the Assistant Director Finance explained that this related to a change in financing costs against the actual revenue stream in the HRA. A reduction in the ratio was a good news story.
- Councillor Gee referred to revaluation losses and losses on sale. She questioned how much this year and the previous year had gone through the income and expenditure account, reducing income available to spend on services. The Assistant Director Finance indicated that the Treasury report was based on the availability and returns the Council was taking from the investment strategies. The investments, assets and the income and expenditure account were part of the Statement of Accounts. Any money generated from investment activity over and above the cost of financing the investment activity became available for services to residents.
- The revaluation for Carnival Pool was operational, land and buildings and not investment properties.
- Minimum revenue provision for investment properties was currently running at 10% over 15 years. If an extraordinary reduction in the value of the properties was seen the Council would need to make a voluntary revenue provision through the accounts to ensure that any devaluation on the properties was covered.
- Minimum revenue provision was discussed in detail.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey commented that capital expenditure for forthcoming years had been reprofiled and questioned how this had been achieved. She was informed that this was part of capital monitoring. When the Council monitored its capital expenditure programme for the year and set its capital budgets going forwards for the next few years, the amount spent on capital impacted on the amount needed to be borrowed as a Council. The Capital Monitoring reports considered by the Executive contained details of what capital programmes had been reprofiled.
- The contents of "Table A", as set out in the report, showed the net benefit per council tax band D equivalent, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equated to £36.62 per band D for 2021/22. Councillor Loyes asked how likely it was that this figure would change. The Assistant Director Finance commented that it may change depending on fluctuations in the Bank of England base rate. The Chief Accountant indicated that the Council was not forecasting to take any further external borrowing until March.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee supports the Treasury Management Mid-Year Report 2021-22, recommends it to Council and notes:

- 1) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to;
- 2) the contents of "Table A", as set out in the report, which shows the net benefit per council tax band D equivalent, from the income generated less the financing costs on all borrowing to date equates to £36.62 per band D for 2021/22. This income is used by the Council to continue to provide priority services for the borough residents.

- 3) As at the end of September 2021, the total external general fund debt was £416m, which reduces to £120m after taking into account cash balances (net indebtedness); External debt is forecast to reduce to £266m by the end of the financial year.

44. PROCUREMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDIT

The Committee considered a report regarding the procurement of external audit.

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

- Under the Local Government Audit & Accountability Act 2014, the Council was required to have appointed an external auditor to audit the accounts. The Council had previously opted into the 'appointing person' national auditor appointment arrangements established by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) for the period covering the accounts for 2018/19 to 2022/23.
- The Assistant Director Governance highlighted the possible options. Officers recommended that PSAA be used, which was the approach used by most Councils.
- Councillor Shenton asked whether there was a requirement to rotate auditors and was informed that PSAA had a requirement that engagement leads were rotated every 5 years (with a possibility of extension for 2 years). There was some rotation at firm level.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Council that external audit be procured using the Sector Led Body, the PSAA, by indicating an option to 'opt in.'

45. 2021/22 INTERNAL AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE TO 31 OCTOBER 2021

The Committee considered the 2021/22 Internal Audit and Investigation Work Programme update to 31 October 2021.

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

- Since the last report the Team had been undertaking a number of audits of key corporate risks, including the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements. This audit helped to demonstrate the new added value approach to undertaking audits. A toolkit had been developed for the ongoing monitoring of the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements against its Local Code of Corporate Governance. The aim was to assist in the further embedding of corporate governance across the Council. This work would also inform the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement and the associated action plan.
- The Corporate Governance audit had also helped to inform the Peer Review.
- Work had commenced with regards to a Climate Emergency audit. A joint piece of work under a co-sourced arrangement was being undertaken, which would help to enhance the audit product where more technical expertise was required. Scoping had been undertaken with Price Waterhouse Coopers and the audit would begin in December.
- Two pieces of work were being scoped around Equality and Diversity.
- A high-level review around the Public Protection Partnership had been agreed and was planned for early Quarter 4.
- Appendix A detailed the status of the audits from the 2021/22 Audit Plan. No audits completed to date had received a category 3 or 4 audit opinion.

- Councillor Gee questioned how likely it was that all audits were achieved by March. The Lead Specialist, Audit and Investigation commented that some factors may cause delays. Any delays would be reported back to the Committee. There was usually some carry forward into the next year.
- Councillor Gee emphasised that the Climate Emergency audit had been requested by the Audit Committee in addition to Overview and Scrutiny. The Assistant Director Governance clarified Overview and Scrutiny had recommended a carbon audit.
- Councillor Gee asked that the key for the audit opinion be included in future reports.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned whether how calls were put through from customer services to other departments, was monitored. She was informed that there was nothing in the current audit plan, but concerns could be picked up for future audit work.

RESOLVED: That the progress of audit and investigation activity against the 2021/22 Work Programme as at 31 October 2021 (attached as Appendix A) be noted.

46. FORWARD PROGRAMME

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

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

- Helen Thompson indicated that the 2020-21 Annual Audit Letter should be renamed Auditor's Annual Report. It was hoped that a draft would be available for the meeting. It was possible that the report would need to be taken to the following meeting.
- It was likely that the Outline Audit Plan would need to be deferred to June.
- The 2022/23 Internal Audit and Investigation Plan, Strategy and Internal Audit Charter would be presented at the next meeting.
- The Committee thanked the Assistant Director Finance for his hard work over the years and wished him well in his new role outside of the Council.

RESOLVED: That the forward programme be noted.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring (Chairman), Angus Ross (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Gary Cowan, Carl Doran, Pauline Jorgensen, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh and Bill Soane

Committee Members in Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Rachelle-Shepherd DuBey

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Peter Dennis, David Hare and Clive Jones

Officers Present

Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery
Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage, and Compliance
Mary Severin, Borough Solicitor
Justin Turvey, Operational Manager - Development Management
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Joanna Carter
Natalie Jarman
Senjuti Manna
Baldeep Pulahi

54. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Stephen Conway.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey attended the meeting virtually, and was therefore marked as in attendance, and was not able to propose, second, or vote on items.

55. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to correcting Bill Soane to be an apology for the meeting.

The Committee gave their thanks to Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, for his years of service and advice to the Committee. The Committee wished him well in his future role.

56. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Andrew Mickleburgh declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 59, Land off Meldreth Way. Andrew stated that he would leave the room for the duration of this item, and take no part in the discussion or vote.

Pauline Jorgensen commented that her address was listed as objecting to item number 59, Land off Meldreth Way, however it was not her who had made the objection and she came into the meeting with an open mind.

57. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

Item number 60, Toutley East (Land adjacent to Toutley Depot), was withdrawn from the agenda.

58. APPLICATION NO.212509 - 160 READING ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG41 1LH

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of a 2no.storey plus loft level dwelling with an integrated garage to include 2No roof lights following the demolition of existing bungalow including alterations to the vehicular/pedestrian entrance

Applicant: G Lupton

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 9 to 42.

The Committee were advised that there were no updates within the Supplementary Planning Agenda.

Peter Mathers, neighbour, spoke in objection to the application. Peter thanked the applicant's architect for submitting revised proposals which were a clear improvement over previous versions, as a result of concerns raised by Members at their October Committee meeting. Peter commented that despite the revised plans, a number of concerns remained. Peter stated that his property was shown as being 8.2m high within the proposed elevations document, whereas the actual height of his property was 7.2m. Peter felt that this had allowed the architect to show number 162 to be the same height as number 164, and number 160 as lower than 162 which was false. Peter stated that number 162 was in fact lower than number 164, and the proposals would allow for number 160 to be higher than number 162, disrupting the downward slope of roof lines in line with the downward slope of the road. Peter was of the opinion that the architect had reduced the proposals from 6 bedrooms, to five bedrooms, and now to four bedrooms in an attempt to gain approval for the largest house possible, which Peter felt was an abuse of process and should warrant refusal. Peter stated that the Reading Road was a wide road and your eye was naturally drawn to one side of the road. On the even numbered side of the road, the average height of these houses was 7.36m, and the proposed dwelling would be over a meter higher than the average property height on this side of the road. Peter queried why the proposed property needed to be considerably higher than surrounding properties, given that the proposal was for a two-storey dwelling. If approved, Peter asked that the property be restricted a maximum height of 8.4m. Peter stated that the property was at risk of surface water flooding, and the applicant's property had flooded 14 years prior. Peter asked that the Committee refuse the application, and encouraged the applicant to come back with a more reasonable proposal.

Peter Lindley-Hughes, architect, spoke in support of the application. Peter stated that the designs had been amended to take in to account the concerns of neighbouring properties, concerns raised at the previous Committee meeting, and to "de-risk" the scheme. Peter stated that the third floor internal level had been addressed, as had the issues relating to the windows, height and massing, whilst the garage had also been omitted in the front garden, and the dormer windows from the third floor were no longer proposed. Peter stated that he was disappointed that neighbouring objections remained despite positive email conversations. Peter added that the ridge height of number 162 was 4m higher than the existing bungalow, whilst number 158 was 1.3m higher. Peter stated that the proposed home would be 1m lower than number 162, and only 1.8m taller than number 158. Peter felt that the development of the neighbouring property, number 162, was acceptable at the

time despite being an overbearing 4m taller than the neighbouring bungalow, and as such the development of number 160 was also acceptable as it was tailored to the changing need of larger family homes over time. Peter added that in his mind, the Committee needed to review whether the correct balance had been struck between suitable scale and mass aligned to planning policy whilst ensuring the future of the proposed home was fit for purpose.

Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Wokingham Town Council, spoke in objection to the application. Imogen stated that she was pleased to see that the loft conversion had been changed to only one room for storage purposes. Imogen added that her remaining concerns centred on the proposed property being large, whilst there appeared to be some dispute over the height of the proposal.

Sam Akhtar commented that the revised proposals seemed reasonable, and from examining the street scene the proposals would appear to fit in with other properties. Sam sought additional clarity regarding surface water flooding. Baldeep Pulahi, case officer, confirmed that condition 4 had been amended and the applicant would be required to submit further details to ensure that issues relating to surface water were covered.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether the drawing on agenda page 37 was accurate, and if it was not could the errors be enough to effect the street scene. Baldeep Pulahi confirmed that she was believed the drawing on agenda page 37 to be correct.

Pauline Jorgensen queried why roof storage required roof lights, and how the roof storage would be accessed. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that the roof lights to the front and rear remained, however the overall floor space was minimal. Justin added that the roof storage would be accessed by stairs.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried whether harm could be caused should the roof storage be used in an alternative way, for example as an office. Justin Turvey stated that the officer opinion was that harm would not be caused in such a use case.

Chris Bowring commented that from the site visit, it was very difficult to see more than one property at a time from the street.

Carl Doran queried whether the drainage condition was amended from the standard wording, and whether the proposed height could be conditioned to not exceed 8.4m. Baldeep Pulahi confirmed that condition 4 was amended following discussions with the Drainage officer, and the applicant could only build the proposed property up to the height within the approved plans, which was 8.4m.

RESOLVED That application number 212509 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 9 to 14.

59. APPLICATION NO.211686 - LAND OFF MELDRETH WAY, LOWER EARLEY
Andrew Mickleburgh declared a prejudicial interest in this item, and in doing so left the room and took no part in the discussion or vote.

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of a food store (Use Class E), 43 no. dwellings (Use Class C3) and associated access, servicing, parking and landscaping.

Applicant: Lower Earley Properties Ltd.

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 43 to 118.

The Committee were advised that the Supplementary Planning Agenda included reference to an additional letter of objection from Jigsaw Planning on behalf of ASDA, requesting two additional reasons for refusal, and reference to the existing officer responses within the report.

Geoff Littler, Earley Town Council, spoke in objection of the application. Geoff stated that the Earley Town Council Planning Committee had considered this application on two occasions, June 2021 and October 2021. Geoff stated that each of the reasons for refusal had been voted on separately by the Town Council Planning Committee, and were all agreed unanimously. Geoff added that the current development plan clearly showed that the land of the subject application was designated as countryside, was not allocated for development, and was outside of the development boundary. Geoff stated that the policy CP11 afforded protection from development to land within that designation as countryside, unless it fell within specified exceptions, which in this case the application did not fall within any of those exceptions. Geoff stated that this parcel of land had remained in its natural state since the inception of Lower Earley, with exception to some partial degradation when the developer undertook some scrub clearance. Geoff added that within the first iteration of the Local Plan Update, this land had been put forward as local green space, and it had been proposed once more for consideration as local green space within the current consultation of the Local Plan Update.

Malcolm Gaudreau, neighbour, spoke in objection to the application. Malcolm stated that he had lived in the area for 34 years, and his property was side on to Swallows Meadow via the gated entrance. Malcolm added that 358 objections had been received, and since the inception of Lower Earley Swallows Meadow had been an open green space, without a lock or prohibition of access, and the grass had been maintained over time. Malcolm stated that many different species were present on the site, including deer, badger, and muntjac deer. Malcolm stated that vehicles regularly exceeded the speed limit on the road, and the addition of a supermarket could lead to serious accidents. Malcolm added that the proposals would only add to existing congestion issues on the road, whilst the effects of the proposals would be devastating for residents of Witcham Close via additional noise, light, vehicle emissions and HGV movements in addition to a loss of privacy and a reduction in house prices. Malcolm stated that flooding was already an issue in the area, and the proposals would only add to this issue. Malcolm concluded by stating there was not the need for an additional supermarket in the area, whereas green spaces within Earley were at a premium.

Andy Jansons, applicant, spoke in support of the application. Andy stated that Jansons property had developed 25 properties within the Thames Valley over the past 19 years, including an application in 2014 for a project on Peach Street and Cross Street which also had a recommendation for refusal which the Committee overturned at the time. Andy added that Lower Earley Properties was a wholly owned subsidiary of Jansons property, and the proposals would include 43 houses, forty percent social housing, and a pre-let supermarket to Lidl. Andy stated that the application had received 600 letters of support, and the land was privately owned via a freehold purchased from the University of Reading. Andy was of the opinion that the site was an edge of settlement development, bounded by two roads being Lower Earley Way and Meldreth Way, was not within the greenbelt and

was an obvious in-fill site. Andy commented that officer feedback and the timing of the feedback had been challenging, including a refusal reason for detrimental impact on acoustic amenity despite no objection from the environmental health officer, and a recommended refusal from highways as neither the applicant nor highways officers have had sufficient time to deal with the issues. Andy stated that he hoped that planning applications would be dealt with on their merits and not on technical issues, and asked that the application be deferred to allow time for technical issues to be resolved prior to returning to the Committee.

David Hare, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. David stated that he lived less than half a mile away from the site, and there were a variety of reasons for refusal of this application. David added that his main concern was that this piece of land was a designated countryside area, and Earley Town Council had asked for this land to be designated as local green space prior to this application being submitted. David stated that the idea of including this site as part of a larger nature reserve corridor was being considered, and the retention of the site was crucial for biodiversity and as a carbon sink. David stated that this site was a valuable part of Earley which allowed local residents to make use of the footpaths on the site and enjoy the surrounding nature. David commented that part of the site had been destroyed by the applicant, however many trees were now subject to a TPO. David added that badgers, foxes, bats and many other animals could be found on the site, and a very valuable scrubland was found on the site where the housing was proposed. David concluded by stating that the application should be refused, and reiterated the importance for local residents, wildlife and biodiversity in retaining the site in its natural state.

Clive Jones, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. Clive stated that his constituents had never expected this to be an application for development as it was a designated countryside area. Clive felt that the proposal for a supermarket would be overbearing and would dominate the views of local houses whilst creating unacceptable noise throughout the day all-the-while having a detrimental impact on the area with several homes losing their acoustic privacy and amenity. Clive stated that a social media survey undertaken by himself and colleagues revealed that 82% of residents did not want improved retail choices in Earley whilst 79% did not want new homes. Clive added that the planning documents showed 57 respondents in favour of the proposals, whilst 24 of those did not live in the Earley (RG6) area, whilst of the 358 objectors on 6 of them did not live in the Earley area. Clive urged the Committee to refuse this application, as it was an unacceptable development within the countryside which have a detrimental effect on local residents within the area.

Chris Bowring sought clarification regarding the height of the supermarket compared to the height of the residential dwellings. Senjuti Manna, case officer, confirmed that the proposed supermarket would be lower than the height of the residential dwellings. However, the height of the residential houses would be significantly higher than the height of the houses within the existing estate.

Chris Bowring queried how no objection from the environmental health officer was compatible with a refusal reason on the grounds of noise. Senjuti Manna stated that the environmental health officer had reviewed the noise report supplied by the applicant which was assessed during lockdown when there was a significantly reduced volume of traffic. Whilst no objection was lodged, a number of pre-commencement conditions were requested. Taking all of this into account, officers believed that noise disturbance would be caused to neighbouring properties as set out within the officer report.

Angus Ross commented that in his view applications such as this one should always be referred to the Committee to allow the public to see the process being carried out. Angus queried why the economic impact on other retail in the area was not considered a viable reason for refusal, and queried whether a caveat could be placed on the Committee's eventual decision to allow further discussions to take place between Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and the applicant, as the expiry date of the application was 15 December 2021. Senjuti Manna stated that the applicant had provided a sequential test in addition to a retail impact assessment, and based on these documents they had demonstrated that there was no alternative site. Officers queried the reports as there was a site already included in policy CP12, however the applicant stated that this was not part of their catchment. Senjuti commented that there were a number of reasons why the application would not be acceptable in principle, for example development within the countryside, and as such a deferral would not address these in-principle reasons for refusal. Chris Bowring commented that some reasons for refusal, for example highways issues, could be removed should the applicant appeal a refusal decision and those issues were subsequently resolved

Sam Akhtar commented that he would have liked to have seen a biodiversity net gain report for this application. Sam raised concerns relating to noise pollution for local residents and additional risk of serious accidents due to the movement of HGV vehicles.

Bill Soane had concerns in relation to noise and vehicle movements, and HGV movements, and questioned whether delivery timings could be conditioned should the Committee be minded to approve the application. Bill added that in his experience, refrigeration equipment was quiet when new however grew increasingly loud as the equipment aged.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that the site was a clear continuation of a green band along the peripheral road, and many of the houses proposed would be situated very close to the main road with a minimal gap. The main road was often noisy with people racing on it, whilst the road was also used as a primary diversion route when the M4 was closed which only make the noise impact on the proposed houses worse. Pauline stated that she had huge sympathy for residents who purchased a property with a large area of open space designated as countryside, who were now facing the prospect of a large supermarket being situated next to them, which would pull a lot of traffic and vehicle movements from outside of the Earley area.

Carl Doran commented that other such major applications recommended for refusal with a large amount of objections should come to Committee in future. Carl queried why this portion of land had not been transferred to WBC as per the original agreement of the Lower Earley development. Senjuti Manna stated that officers had investigated this issue and whilst not being able to ascertain the specifics, the land had not been handed to WBC in time and time had now run out to enforce this. Senjuti commented that this application had come to Committee as it had been listed by the Assistant Director for Place, whilst the application was brought to the attention of the Chairman given the considerable amount of objections and support.

Carl Doran commented that the application had seen a lot of support outside of the Earley area, whilst the leaflet distributed by the applicant only offered the opportunity to show support for provision of a new supermarket. Carl added that the habitat survey had been carried out after some of the area was felled, and in his opinion there was no essential

need for a food store. Carl stated that the site was part of a green corridor, and approval of this application would set a dangerous precedent for development on other parts of the green corridor, whilst at least four of the refusal reasons would not be able to be overcome via negotiations, as they were strictly contrary to policy.

Pauline Jorgensen queried when the opportunity to enforce the transfer of the land elapsed, and queried why highways issues had not been resolved despite having around a year to negotiate. Senjuti Manna stated that the opportunity to enforce the transfer ended around 1999. Senjuti added that other options, or example an injunction, were possible and were being explored by officers. Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage and Compliance, stated that some of the highways information had only arrived two days prior to the Committee meeting and left officers with no time to thoroughly review the information. Justin Turvey, Operational Manager – Development Management, stated that the officer recommendation of refusal would likely remain irrespective of the highways issues being resolved due to the in-principle reasons for refusal remaining.

RESOLVED That application number 211686 be refused for the reasons set out in agenda pages 45 to 47.

Andrew Mickleburgh re-joined the meeting.

60. APPLICATION NO.211777 - TOUTLEY EAST, LAND ADJACENT TOUTLEY DEPOT, WEST OF TWYFORD ROAD

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

61. APPLICATION NO.203544 - LAND TO THE WEST OF ST ANNES DRIVE AND SOUTH OF LONDON ROAD

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 54 units (including 19 affordable homes) with associated access road from St Anne's Drive, landscaping and open space.

Applicant: Beaulieu Homes

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 159 to 242.

The Committee were advised that updates contained within the Supplementary Planning Agenda included:

- Confirmation that a response of no objection had been received from Natural England;
- Amended final paragraph on agenda page 159;
- Insertion of approved plans related to condition 2;
- Insertion of plan related to condition 19;
- Insertion of plan related to condition 20;
- Clarification that agenda page 209 paragraph 63 should refer to "*Open Space Typology Plan*";
- Additional condition 40 in relation to access.

David Stack, neighbour, spoke in objection of the application. David stated that he was speaking on behalf of local residents, and this planning application had been started over 6 years ago, with previous versions being refused and appealed by the developer and eventually withdrawn on the strength of the Council's recommendation. David added that this application had generated over 300 objections online from local residents. David

stated that there were four main reasons for refusing this application, and noted that application 211686 had been refused by the Committee for the same reasons. David added that the application site currently sat within designated countryside, and core strategy CP11 stated that proposals outside of development limits, including within countryside, would not be permitted unless one of the exceptions applied, which David felt that it did not in this case. David stated that the settlement boundary sat outside of the current settlement boundary of Wokingham and failed to demonstrate how it would maintain the separation between Wokingham and Bracknell to prevent harm to the visual amenity of the local area, whilst being contrary to policy CP21 and the South Wokingham strategic development plan. David commented that the strategic development plan clearly showed that the site was not allocated for development and was not part of the South Wokingham SDL plans for housing, and was identified to be open green space to contribute to the settlement separation between Bracknell and Wokingham, and approval of this application would therefore be contrary to the strategic plan. David stated that as of 31 March 2020 Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) was able to demonstrate a 5.23 year housing land supply, whilst three large scale developments had been identified within the Local Plan Update, and as such WBC did not need to approve further small scale developments such as this one, which was contrary to a number of policies and plans.

Kay Collins, agent, spoke in support of the application. Kay stated that the applicant had engaged in positive discussions with WBC officers to make changes to the proposed scheme with a number of positive benefits. Kay added that the proposals were well contained with a good buffer and would not lead to the coalescence of Wokingham and Bracknell. Kay stated that it was a well planned development of 54 dwellings set within a series of areas of linked open spaces, with access and junctions approved by officers having also passed a road safety audit. Kay added that the layout had been significantly amended to achieve an improved relationship with the A329 and residential development to the north, whilst there were more substantial open space areas towards the north and frontage to enable further mitigation and integration with the surrounding landscape. Kay stated that walking and cycle routes were provided to the wider area within the development, which had been missing until now. Kay commented that the development was of a significantly lower density than those of the surrounding sites, with 16 dwellings per hectare compared to an assumed density within the SDL of between 25 and 30 dwellings per hectare. Kay stated that the majority of the proposed dwellings would have between 3 and 4 bedrooms, which was in keeping with the rural interface character area, whilst the affordable housing provision would provide much needed affordable properties with some of the homes being 2 bedrooms to reflect the local need. Kay commented that the site would enable increased connectivity from both Montague Park and allowing better access to the development overall. Kay stated that the development was sustainable, with a number of facilities including primary schools, retail, allotments, a public house and bus stops all within walking distance. The development would provide an overall net gain of trees across the site whilst providing a ten percent biodiversity net gain. Kay added that the site would provide a higher number of electric charging points that was required, whilst the proposals would generate significant levels of CIL and S106 contributions.

Peter Dennis, Ward Member, spoke in objection of the application. Peter was of the opinion that this application should be rejected as the previous version had also been rejected. Peter stated that the proposals sat outside of the Local Planning Document and were situated in an area of open green space. Peter added that the previous application discussed on the evening had been refused for the same reasons that this application, in his opinion, should be refused upon. Peter felt that the presumed use of the already heavily used SANGs, and the destruction of TPOd hedges to provide access to the site

was dubious at best. Peter added that use of the existing SANGs would require users to cross a 6 lane main road, which would deter many users. Peter stated that the previous application was refused in part due to a lack of SANG provision, and the site was a gateway entrance to Wokingham providing a good green view into town, and the removal of many trees to provide access to the site would destroy this view. Peter suggested that the site could instead be allowed to re-wild to help meet WBC's aspiration to become a tree city of the world. Peter stated that the site was rich in wildlife, including deer and slowworms, which would be pressured via the proposed development. Peter added that the sustainable plan would provide money to My Journey, which did not build sustainable travel infrastructure, and to build a pathway into the SANG allocated to Montague Park. Peter added that cars trying to access the site would have to drive out of Wokingham to the A329m and turn back, adding to the merging of Wokingham and Bracknell. Peter concluded by stating that this application was situated in an open green space, outside of the settlement boundary, which would lead to a lack of separation between Wokingham and Bracknell whilst causing parking issues, and residents needed to see WBC acting in the interest of residents by refusing this application.

Carl Doran queried how this application differentiated from its previous iteration and how the previous reasons for refusal could have been overcome, queried what consultation had been carried out, sought clarity regarding the expected number of homes to be delivered within the SDL, and queried whether the proposal was encroaching on the settlement separation gap. Joanna Carter, case officer, stated that the overall number of proposed houses had been reduced whilst an improved infrastructure contribution had now been secured. In addition, the provision of local SANGs would mitigate the impact on the Thames Basin Heath. Garden and amenity space had also been improved, including outside space for owners of apartments. The previous scheme was of greater density, and the newly secured SANG was considered on balance to provide an acceptable buffer between Wokingham and Bracknell. With regards to consultation, Joanna stated that consultation with neighbouring properties had been carried out, however the separate community involvement exercise was outside of this process. Excluding this development, the SDL was expected to deliver approximately 2450 homes. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Planning and Delivery, stated that the previous scheme was inferior to this scheme, and the SANG to the south of the site was not secured at the time of application, whereas now it was. As the SANG was secured, the application site was no longer required as open space for the South Wokingham SDL, and officers considered that the separation gap between Wokingham and Bracknell would be maintained.

Rebecca Margetts sought clarity as to how the site would be accessed from the main road. Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage, and Compliance, stated that the only way to access the site was to enter from the Coppid Beech roundabout and turn left into the site.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether any dangerous manoeuvres could be attempted to access the site via a right turn. Chris Easton stated that a full central island was present outside of the site which would prevent access to the site via a right turn.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether garages and car ports were required to be retained for parking rather than for accommodation, and queried who was responsible for the proposed car parking management strategy and what recourse was available to residents should this not be sufficient. Chris Easton confirmed that all houses would be provided with two car parking spaces and each flat would have one allocated space in addition to a number of unallocated spaces, with some houses having garages in addition to the two car parking spaces with the garages having their permitted development right of conversion to

accommodation removed via condition 38. In relation to the parking management strategy, this was there to help manage the car parking on the site. The site may not be adopted by WBC, in which case it would be up to a management company to manage the site, which conformed to WBC parking standards.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried the rationale behind not undertaking any air quality impact monitoring prior to development, queried why the Bracknell Forest SANG was not considered suitable previously, and queried if there were other alternative sites which supported the underlying policy objectives. Joanna Carter stated that the environmental health officer found it acceptable to secure the air quality assessment as a condition at a later stage. In addition, this site was located in a similar location to the Keephatch development, which would be subject to very similar air quality levels. Joanna stated that there was no requirement for a SANG to be adjacent or in a very close proximity to a site, and Natural England had raised no objection subject to agreement from WBC and Bracknell Forest Council who owned the SANG, which had now been agreed, and as such that original reason for refusal no longer applied. Connor Corrigan stated that the SDL plans had allocated land outside of the settlement boundary within the countryside. These sites were considered acceptable as infrastructure came with development, and this was a key difference between sites within an SDL and a windfall site within the countryside.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that the purpose of an SDL defining an area for development was failing as these defined areas were creeping out under the justification of a nearby SDL. Gary felt that officers should monitor the tree planting strategy at development sites, as large numbers of newly planted trees were not surviving. Gary queried how many trees were being removed, what grade they were, and what they were being replaced by. Joanna Carter stated that 35 trees were proposed to be felled, 19 trees within the north east corner of the site. Alternative access solutions for access were not possible on highways safety grounds. The majority of the trees proposed to be felled were of low value, whilst 3 TPO trees at the access and 7 TPO trees in total were proposed to be felled. Joanna added that only trees with a low or moderate value were proposed to be removed.

Gary Cowan was of the opinion that the application should be refused as it would result in development within designated countryside whilst not satisfying the criteria set out under the Core Strategy.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried how far away a SANG could be to satisfy its purpose, raised concern that some green land was protected whilst others were not, and noted that at a SANG in Winnersh had a very large percentage of the newly planted trees had not survived. Connor Corrigan stated that Natural England allowed SANGs to be situated around 4km to 5km from a site with car parking provision, so long as it was within a reasonable walking distance.

Bill Soane queried whether a signalised right turn in to the proposed site would be possible. Chris Easton clarified that this would not be possible based on the layout and specification of the North Wokingham Distributor Road.

In response to a variety of points from Members, Connor Corrigan stated that the principle of development was accepted for this site as it was located within the wider SDL. Connor added that the land that now had permission for a SANG was previously just a field. The South Wokingham, south of the railway development, relied on that area of SANG to facilitate its development, and as such that area of SANG would remain as green space.

Connor stated that the Committee needed to resolve whether the separation gap proposed by officers was wide enough to maintain the clear separation of Wokingham and Bracknell.

Gary Cowan proposed that the application be refused on the grounds that the development failed to demonstrate how it would maintain the separation between Wokingham and Bracknell and prevent harm to the visual amenities of the local area, which was contrary to Core Strategy 21 and the South Wokingham SPD, and would result in the loss of trees which were subject to tree preservation orders (TPOs). This proposal was seconded by Carl Doran, and upon being put to the vote the motion to refuse the application was carried.

RESOLVED That application number 203544 be refused, on the grounds that the development failed to demonstrate how it would maintain the separation between Wokingham and Bracknell and prevent harm to the visual amenities of the local area, which was contrary to Core Strategy 21 and the South Wokingham SPD, and would result in the loss of trees which were subject to tree preservation orders (TPOs).

62. APPLICATION NO.211975 - NUTBEAN FARM, NUTBEAN LANE, SWALLOWFIELD

Proposal: Full application for the proposed change of use of land from agricultural to equestrian plus erection of 2 no. stable buildings with associated hardstanding, the creation of a manège and extended vehicular access (part retrospective).

Applicant: Mr Jem Dance

The Committee consider a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 243 to 268.

The Committee were advised that updates contained within the Supplementary Planning Agenda included:

- Additional condition 9 relating to landscaping, and officer comment;
- Confirmation that a consultation response had been received from Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Ecology with a recommendation of approval subject to conditions;
- Updated comments from the WBC Ecology officer, and associated officer response.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether specific permission could be applied to the applicant in relation to commercial activity. Natalie Jarman, case officer, stated that condition 4 restricted commercial activity, and should the applicant wish to remove this condition they would be required to apply to remove that condition and consideration would have to be made at that time.

RESOLVED That application number 211975 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 244 to 247, and additional condition 9 as set out within the Supplementary Planning Agenda.

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.25 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Guy Grandison (Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Clive Jones and Jackie Rance (Substitute)

Committee Members in Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (Substitute)

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Halsall (Leader of the Council), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Stuart Munro (Executive Member for Business and Economic Development) and Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions)

Officers Present

Christine Bennett (Interim Assistant Director HR & OD), Neil Carr (Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Nick Spencer (Digital Delivery and PMO Manager), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change), Callum Wernham (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist) and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery)

56. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Alison Swaddle, Paul Fishwick, and Phil Cunnington.

Jackie Rance attended the meeting as a substitute for Alison Swaddle, and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey attended the meeting as a substitute for Paul Fishwick.

Shirley Boyt, Anne Chadwick, and Rachelle Shepherd Dubey attended the meeting virtually, and were therefore marked as in attendance, and they were not able to propose, second, or vote on items.

57. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the third bullet point on agenda page 6 being amended to state “until at least Easter 2023”.

58. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

60. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

61. MTFP 2022-25: PROPOSED CAPITAL AND REVENUE BIDS FOR THE COMMUNITIES, INSIGHT AND CHANGE AND RESOURCES AND ASSETS DIRECTORATES

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 17 to 84, which set out the revenue and capital bids for the Directorates encompassing Communities, Insight and Change, and Resources and Assets.

Parry Bath (Executive Member for Environment and Leisure), John Halsall (Leader of the Council), John Kaiser (Executive Member for Finance and Housing), Stuart Munro (Executive Member for Business and Economic Development), Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions), Christine Bennett (Assistant Director for HR and OD), Graham Ebers (Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Resources and Assets)), Nick Spencer (Digital Delivery and PMO Manager), Sally Watkins (Assistant Director Digital & Change), and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery) attended the meeting to answer Member queries.

It was noted that a large deal of uncertainty remained with regards to a number of the bids, and some of the bids were subject to change in the coming weeks once the Local Government Finance Settlement had been received. Officers commented that they would endeavour to hit the required deadlines for the Committee meeting scheduled on 5th January 2022 if possible, and added that any questions submitted from Members in advance of the meeting would be useful to assist in the provision of more in-depth answers on the evening.

Communities, Insight, and Change

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

- In relation to bid CIC R6, ReCustomer App for Council Tax and selected services, what were the potential benefits of this app? Assistant Director response – The service was keen to understand best practice from a number of other Authorities to see the benefits from a customer perspective. As such, the bid was placed for 2023/24 to allow time for detailed research and benchmarking.
- With regards to the proposed paperless Borough News, had the potential impacts on some residents been taken into account? Assistant Director response – This bid was included within the first version of proposals, but following further consideration this bid would be withdrawn due to certain negative impacts to residents.
- In relation to bid CIC R2, Land Charges shortfall in income, could this bid be explained further? Deputy Chief Executive response – The ongoing expectancy was that there would be a shortfall in land charge fees. As such, a growth bid was being proposed to eliminate the unachievable level of the income stream.
- In relation to bids CIC R3 and R10, implementation of new HR target operating model, what was the growth portion of this bid aiming to achieve? Assistant Director response – The revenue bid was for the increased baseline within the HR budget to deliver services for internal customers, with a strong leadership team enabling an improved delivery of HR functions. The special item was to provide transitional posts to support changes in the interim period, which would tail off in 2023/24. It was noted that the description of the two bids was the same, which would be clarified in future versions.

- In relation to bid CIC R1, additional people resources across Customer Delivery, were the proposed additional 7 staff enough to deal with the increasing call volumes? Executive Member and officer response – The service had seen an approximate 20 percent increase in calls in 2020/21, as the service had always been open to residents. The proposed additional posts was what was believed to be affordable at present, and if a subsequent enhancement was required at a later date then the service could place a supplementary estimate request to the Executive.
- In relation to CIC R6, ReCustomer App for Council Tax and selected services, what did the red RAG status represent? Executive Member response – There was uncertainty as to whether the app would be required as it was limited only to Council Tax, and officers would be researching best practice at a number of other Local Authorities prior to making any final decisions.
- In relation to CIC C1, Microsoft E5, why was this being placed as a capital bid rather than as an ongoing revenue cost? Assistant Director response – Whilst this was not a new bid there was the opportunity to capitalise the license and the service had chosen to do so. This would allow best use to be made of revenue costs in other areas.
- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, what would the additional expenditure buy in terms of staff and expertise? Assistant Director response – This expenditure would provide additional resource and support to work with the community and staff around equality and diversity via fixed term contract resource.
- In relation to bids CIC R4 and R10, implementation of new HR target operating model, Members noted that it was good to see additional investment within HR. Should these bids not be successful, would that mean that the negatives outlined within the bid were currently occurring, and would continue to do so? Executive Member and Assistant Chief Executive Response - As a result of the pandemic, HR had seen increased challenge and workload including a number of complex issues. As a result, investment was proposed to meet the challenge that the service was now facing, to meet the needs of internal customers.
- It was commented that bid CIC R5, new content management system, was a very sensible decision.
- In relation to bid CIC R7, revenue support for Capital Bids (telephony, security, fibre, and IDS), it was commented that it was very good to see these systems being upgraded. How old were the current systems? Executive Member response – Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) was always at risk from attacks from a variety of sources, however no major breaches had occurred. This bid was about future-proofing systems as attacks would only get more sophisticated whilst legislation became more complicated.
- In relation to bid CIC R8, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, why was the growth bid only proposed from 2024/25? Assistant Chief Executive Response – This was currently being funded via a special item, however a permanent growth bid would better reflect that continuous improvement was now hardwired into the organisation.

- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, a Member commented that it was good to see this investment. However, could WBC afford to only have these posts as fixed term contracts? Executive Member response – This bid would set up the process and model, rather than actually carrying out the function, to become a core part of how WBC operated.
- In relation to bid CIC R12, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, how would this funding be spent as the proposed spend was quite substantial? Assistant Chief Executive and Assistant Director response – The first two years would attract significant expenditure, whilst the resource would be heavily reduced in 2023/24. The funding would introduce a change gateway, which would promote innovation, savings, partnership working, and digital improvement across the organisation.
- In relation to bid CIC R7, revenue support for Capital Bids (telephony, security, fibre, and IDS), it was commented that it was great to see investment in this area. Were legacy telephone systems proposed to be moved to MS Teams? Assistant Director response – Teams telephony would replace on-premises infrastructure via moving to voice-over-IP (VOIP) to allow MS Teams to be used to make and receive phone calls.
- In relation to bid CIC R11, Equalities and Anti-Poverty Communication and Engagement, this was the second year of the Equality Strategy and as such it was surprising to see another special item rather than a growth bid. In addition, it was commented that it was slightly concerning to see both equalities and anti-poverty placed together, rather than having separate bids and aims. Assistant Director response – The cross-party working group recognised the need to strengthen the equalities program and embed it within the organisation. The funding would sufficiently cover both aspects of the bid, however the feedback regarding placing both aspects together would be taken on-board.
- In relation to bid CIC R12, budget required to deliver sustainable organisational change, what had been learnt from previous change programmes? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – Change was often about making mistakes and improving upon them with innovation and boldness. The key learning point was to ensure that the governance and resource structure was in place to enable learning and delivery to embrace the ongoing approach of continuous improvement within the organisation. Previously, some change had been under-resourced, and it was important to enact change that worked for the organisation rather than making changes which were simply quick and speedy. Change was about investing in the organisation to embed good practice, rather than looking for short-term wins.
- In relation to the proposed smart phone refresh, was this bid to enable staff to take advantage of the new features within the Microsoft E5 licence? Assistant Director response – Capital was always built into hardware purchases as hardware was required to be periodically refreshed to take advantage of new functions and to ensure that the handsets were up to date and running on supported versions for security purposes.
- In relation to bid CIC C2, IMT Infrastructure; Networks & Security, was the proposed spend of £1m sufficient? Assistant Director response – WBC were always investing to ensure that our IT provision was resilient and secure, and the Head of IT at WBC supported the bid.

- In relation to bid CIC C3, IMT devices, how many new devices would the expenditure provide? Assistant Director response – This funding would provide for approximately 200-300 devices to be replaced per annum on a rolling basis, in line with industry best practice.

Resources and Assets

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

- In relation to bid RA R2, income generation in excess of financing costs (commercial properties), how much would be required to be spent to achieve the £700k income, what was the current interest rate for the public works loan board and how did this compare to three years ago? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The interest rate for the public works loan board long term loans was 2%, which was very comparable when compared to the past few years. The £700k was not necessarily going to be the projected income in the next version of the bids for various reasons, including the market being oversaturated. Should the projected income be lower, then the associated borrowing would also fall. Opportunities, for example with solar panels, would be looked at more closely where there were both significant opportunities to make a return and to enhance WBC's climate emergency agenda.
- In relation to bid RA R3, rationalisation process of corporate accommodation, what were the potential reasons behind the amber RAG status? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The savings proposed within year one were likely to be more than achievable, however should the pandemic require some of the existing outlier accommodation to be retained then this could impact savings. WBC were currently in the process of undertaking the workplace reimaged project, however this had not been completed yet. As an organisation, there was a desire to move towards a more technologically driven model to enable cost and carbon savings.
- In relation to bid RA R4, contracts and commissioning reviews, which contracts were expected to deliver savings? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – These savings were being delivered across a variety of contracts across WBC. Extra resource was being added to the procurement team to support the contract management process based on CIPFA best practice. There was a fair level of confidence that the savings of £250k could be delivered, however savings for future years could be impacted due to inflation and rising costs for contractors.
- In relation to bid RA R2, income generation in excess of financing costs (commercial properties), it was noted that the proposed savings were subject to change in future versions. In addition, this was the tail end of a programme of savings delivered over previous financial years.
- In relation to bid RA R5, delivery intention of 1000 homes over four years at 5 percent, why was the income projected to remain constant over the three years? Deputy Chief Executive response – A relative degree of caution was being applied to this bid due to the changing landscape of construction and housing delivery, and as such the income target had not been added to, over and above the base amount.
- In relation to bid RA R7, benefit realisation from commercial activities, where was the projected income coming from? Deputy Chief Executive response – This figure used to

be for £300k, and there were now specific targets within the leisure portfolio, for example the new boxing hub and proposed outdoor gym. The remaining £153k was the remaining income which was required to be found across all other possible commercial activities.

- In relation to bid RA R11, development of a sustainable procurement service, was this an expected one off cost? Deputy Chief Executive response – The bid was in place to fund additional resource in year one and to retain the resource on an ongoing basis. The savings provided by the additional resource were expected to cover the costs of the bid.
- In relation to bid RA R10, Internal Audit and Investigation redesign to set up an in-house service with external clients, who were the external clients? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – WBC did work for three other Local Authorities, and the success of this work was a testament to the quality of our Audit team. There was a desire to strengthen and improve our internal Audit team further, to enable even more regular reporting across the organisation and to provide additional resilience.
- In relation to bid RA R5, delivery intention of 1000 homes over four years at 5 percent, was the amber RAG status a result of increasing construction costs? Executive Member response – Yes, however the hope was that the overall delivery of the project would not be put in jeopardy. WBC had the land and the customers, however even affordable homes were out of reach for many. Therefore, the possibility to deliver increased levels of social housing were being explored.
- In relation to bid RA R14, decrease in uptake of schools kitchen contract, could further information be provided? Executive Member response – The uptake had seen a reduction over time, however there were a core of families using the service to get a good hot meal each day, whilst a particular focus was being placed on primary aged children.
- In relation to the bid for Member laptops, was there a need for this? Executive Member response – This bid had been in situ for a number of years and would be progressed, for example, should Members require WBC laptops for security purposes.
- In relation to bid RA R6, early repayment programme, could more detail be provided? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The programme was doing well, and it was about building strong payment processes across the system whilst being clear about costings. The programme enabled WBC to build a premium supplier list to be paid sooner than their standard terms with a built in saving, and the service was confident that the proposed savings could be achieved. The programme had saved approximately £60k during the last year, and once fully implemented was expected to deliver between £200k and £250k per year.
- In relation to bid RA R8, boxing hub, were the projected income figures of £330k per annum achievable? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The hub was still in the mobilisation stage, for example offering free classes, and the figures were subject to change in the next version of the bids.
- In relation to bid RA R10, Internal Audit and Investigation redesign to set up an in-house service with external clients, was there anything within the contract to allow cost

recovery from RBWM? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – This was doubtful as RBWM were acting within the bounds of the contract, and this bid was proposed to fill the gap whilst the in-house service was finalised.

- In relation to bid RA C1, community investment, how was the proposed £66m in funding proposed to be split? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – The money available was part of the key corporate objective agreed by the Executive and Full Council. Some of the funding was made up from housing investment and commuted sums built up over previous years.
- In relation to bid RA C2, work place reimagined, was selling off the rectory space for residential accommodation feasible? Deputy Chief Executive response – The outcome of the workplace reimagined programme was required to gauge the views of staff, however there was an expectancy that WBC would have office space in excess of our needs. There was therefore potential to rent out some of the space commercially, or turn it into another form of use which was beneficial for WBC. The Committee were advised that they may find it useful to treat this bid as a yellow or red RAG status. A Member commented that if feasible, this seemed like a reasonable proposal.
- In relation to bid RA C3, Carnival Pool redevelopment, what might happen with the proceeds should the site of the old library be sold? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – There were no plans regarding the current library site, and any future use of the site would be used to reduce the debt of the Town Centre.
- In relation to bid RA C3, Carnival Pool redevelopment, was the project on target? Executive Member response – The pool was on target, whilst the centre was believed to be on target also.
- In relation to bid RA C4, new pool at Arborfield, how was the use of the facility by the public and the local school going to be split? Executive Member response – The facility would be predominantly for public use, with certain times blocked out for use by the school. The school was a forward thinking trust, and WBC needed to be robust when dealing with them to ensure that residents got fair use of the facility. The facility had been funded by S106 contributions, with some small costs paid for by WBC to ensure that the facility met the needs of our leisure objectives.
- In relation to bid RA C5, renewable energy infrastructure projects, were details available regarding where the £8m worth of solar panels might be placed? Executive Member and Deputy Chief Executive response – These bid lines were confusing as they took into account several projects, and as such the bids would be made clearer going forwards. The business case was strong for these projects as it would pay for the projects and make a return on the investments. Additional details relating to exactly where the assets would be placed would be finalised in future.
- In relation to bid RA C6, energy reduction projects, could any additional detail be given on the types of projects being considered? Executive Member response – This was part of a rolling project to invest in energy reduction schemes, for example lighting and insulation improvements.
- The Executive Member thanked the Committee for challenging and enlightening questions and comments, and added that he hoped that version two of the proposed bids would provide further clarity for the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Parry Batth, John Halsall, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Christine Bennett, Graham Ebers, Nick Spencer, Sally Watkins, and Jackie Whitney be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Version two of the proposed bids be presented to the Committee in January 2022 after receipt of the Local Government Finance Settlement;
- 3) Members of the Committee provide any initial questions relating to version two of the bids in advance of the meeting to allow for more in-depth answers on the evening.

62. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme, set out in agenda pages 85 to 86.

The Committee were advised that the items related to the Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy and the Customer Journey item had been delayed to the next municipal year, as the projects required additional time prior to presentation. In addition, the Arts and Culture Strategy update had been postponed as many of the projects had been delayed due to the pandemic. Once additional projects and activities had been carried out, an update would be taken to the Committee.

It was requested that officers ascertain how much ongoing funding was available to enact the Arts and Culture Strategy.

The Committee requested a further update regarding bringing the public protection partnership back in house at their March 2022 Committee meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Callum Wernham be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 2) Items relating to the Borough Wide Parking Management Strategy, the Customer Journey, and the Arts and Culture Strategy update be considered during the next municipal year;
- 3) Officers ascertain how much ongoing funding was available to enact the Arts and Culture Strategy;
- 4) A further update regarding bringing the public protection partnership back in house be considered at the March 2022 Committee meeting.

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2021 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), Parry Batth, Graham Howe, Charles Margetts and Bill Soane

Other Councillors In Attendance

John Kaiser, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and Housing
Pauline Jorgensen, Highways and Transport
Stuart Munro, Business and Economic Development
Wayne Smith, Planning and Enforcement
Laura Blumenthal
Gary Cowan
Sarah Kerr

75. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Gregor Murray.

Councillors Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith did not attend the meeting in person but took part virtually.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency, attended on behalf of Councillor Murray. In accordance with legislation Councillor Blumenthal could speak on any item but was not allowed to vote.

76. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

77. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

Last month we were seeing Covid numbers going down very favourably and there were grounds for belief that the pandemic was being contained. This was true for Delta but sadly we have now seen the emergence of Omicron; which presupposes that we had ten variants in between which did not bear mentioning.

Currently, the rate of new Covid cases within the Borough remains high. The current rate is 610 per 100,000. This rate is slightly below the rates across the South-East; 649 per 100,000. Most cases continue to occur within our school age population and their parents as we reach the end of the school term this week.

The current rate reflects the cases across the week 1-6 December, and does not begin to reflect any potential impact of the new Omicron variant in Wokingham. UK Chief Medical Officers, earlier this week, increased the UK Covid Alert from Level 3 to Level 4 due to a rapid increase in cases of the Omicron variant. There is much still to learn about the new variant but what is known is that it is extremely transmissible, cases are doubling every 2-3 days, which means that cases will rise exponentially across the coming weeks.

It is too early to draw firm conclusions about the severity of the disease that Omicron causes. However, even if it is a milder illness in an individual, the sheer volume of cases that are expected, coupled with a slight drop in vaccine effectiveness would lead to a substantial increase in hospitalisation. Hospitalisations are expected to rise in the UK over the next two weeks.

Data published last Friday suggests that vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic infection is substantially reduced against Omicron where a person has had two doses, but that a third dose boosts protection back up to over 70%. There is an urgent national Omicron appeal for the public to 'Get Boosted Now', we need to call upon all our residents to come forward for their booster; indeed, if they haven't their first or second doses. We are working tirelessly to support health partners on the delivery of the vaccination programme across the Borough, offering our local buildings and staff to facilitate vaccine delivery and advocating for our residents to maximise their opportunity to access their vaccine or booster.

Officers across the Council are working to maximise the effectiveness of the Government's Plan B implemented over the past week. For residents this means wearing masks where it is appropriate for them to do so, working from home where possible and accessing their Covid passports where necessary. We also continue to work tirelessly to ensure people are getting tested when it is right for them to do so (rapid lateral flow testing before socialising where someone has no symptoms, or regularly across seven days as a contact of a case; and PCR testing when someone has symptoms) and encouraging subsequent isolation when required.

The coming weeks will see many occasions and celebrations bringing people together in the run up to Christmas. Please remember that we are now within ten days of Christmas so anyone testing positive from now will be isolating across the Christmas period. We must remain cautious and continue to employ all measures we can to make these occasions as safe as possible and reduce transmission as much as we can.

So, the message remains please get your jabs and booster and encourage everybody else to do so as well.

My Administration commissioned a LGA Peer Review as part of our aspiration "to be the best we can be". We know that we are a good organisation; we want to be the best. The acid test is the service we provide for our residents. This is one of the strategic priorities contained within our Community Vision. My Administration is committed to continuously learning and continuously improving, and the peer review makes an important contribution to that process.

My Administration has reviewed the impact of the pandemic on our local priorities and has identified emerging areas of need for example, equalities and deprivation.

As the Council is about to enter the next phase of development it is a good time to receive independent feedback of our progress, how we are perceived by our stakeholders, and how well placed we are to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

I am delighted to report that the feedback from the Peer Review was very positive. We are a very good Council, which is very well run in their opinion. We are addressing tonight their initial criticism in that we could do better in our community engagement and digital communications.

Last month we launched the Local Plan consultation. Numerous drop-in sessions have been held together with additional consultations at Shute End. Several local groups have emerged to oppose parts of the consultation.

We have no wish to extinguish one square inch of greenfields and have opposed housing numbers vigorously. We, a Conservative administration, we, as a Council, and in particular I, both as a Councillor and a resident, will continue to do so. We are emotionally and intellectually against more development in the Borough.

However, there are councils who have refused the Local Plan process and have had one imposed by the Ministry of Housing who can in extreme cases of non-cooperation result in the loss of the local authority right to determine planning applications.

Again, I stress this is a consultation and there is a long way to go before it emerges as a Local Plan, if indeed it ever does. Please respond to the consultation either on-line, by email or by post. We are seeking all your views and want to hear what all our residents want to say.

Whilst the housing number is greater than I would wish, the Government proposed a revision to their standard method which would have more than doubled our annual requirement to over 1,600 dwellings a year. We campaigned hard and submitted robust technical challenges against the proposal which was subsequently abandoned by the Government. We led the cause.

Local Plans are key documents which set out the strategy and associated policies for managing development. Not having a current Local Plan means that developers can successfully apply for planning permission. This speculative development occurs with little infrastructure and more housing. There is hardly a square inch of the Borough which is not optioned by a developer. Not having a Plan could result in several times more homes being built.

Our current Local Plan, the Core Strategy, has worked well, with most of the development occurring in places where planned, supported by huge investment in infrastructure including new schools, roads, and green spaces, more importantly it has allowed the Council to refuse and win at appeals against developers proposing unsuitable sites.

Refreshing our Local Plan will mean our planning policies continue to be effective and will be difficult for developers to challenge with inappropriate alternative sites. Without a new Plan, there will be less control over where development happens, and it will be much harder to try and improve infrastructure alongside.

For housing, the Government introduced a standard method which calculates the housing need for local authorities. For Wokingham Borough the housing need currently calculates as 768 homes each year.

My Administration has engaged the leading planning barrister and statistician to help understand whether we could progress a case for exceptional circumstances. Disappointingly the outcome was that there were no compelling reasons under the current Government framework to do so.

To be clear, if we progress a Local Plan which does not enable this amount of housing expected by the Government, it will not pass examination in public, bringing all the

negatives of loss of control. I am however continuing to lobby the Government at every level to see what we can do to reduce the housing numbers.

To summarise this is a consultation. We would like as many residents as possible to respond to this consultation so that we can get the next iteration right. Please respond either on-line, by email or by letter.

Today's main item of business is to agree my Administration's approach to Domestic Abuse, detailed plans about how this will be achieved are set out in the new Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024. However, with the importance of this subject, I spent some time reflecting on the journey that we have embarked upon to get us to this point.

Over the past three years, through the width and breadth of the work of the Community Safety Partnership, we have been driving and embedding continuous improvements across the whole organisation including, Housing Services and Children and Adults' Social Care and Place and Growth. We have prioritised our corporate commitment to further raise the skills and expertise and embed good practice across the whole organisation.

We have put in place an Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, to ensure that our multi-agency work with our partners including Thames Valley Police and housing associations, victims of anti-social behaviour are safeguarded and helped. This has ensured that complex issues affecting residents, often interlinked with domestic abuse are resolved expediently.

To improve our service offer for residents, we are bringing the Public Protection Partnership back in-house, under the Safety and Enforcement Service. With the direction of a newly appointed service manager, this team will ensure that residents receive a comprehensive out of hours response to a wide range of anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance complaints; something which has not currently existed within the PPP. We have also put in place a newly appointed Emergency Planning Manager, to further bolster my Administration's civil contingencies resilience response.

More than a year before the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, we recognised that the demand from victims of domestic abuse had increased dramatically locally. To ensure the right level of safe provision was in place we acted by increasing our investment in funding for our local commissioned service by 55%. We also, took the key decision to recruit, a subject matter expert on domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post has been pivotal in helping us navigate and embed this vital work. We fully recognised that this would be the foundation upon which we would build our wider response to the violence against women and girls' agenda.

Since then, we have engaged and regularly facilitate the bringing together of 43 domestic abuse stakeholders. Many of which are local organisations such as Kaleidoscopic UK, a peer support service for victims and SupportU, a service offering support for LGBT+ victims, and amongst others, Cranston our local commissioned domestic abuse service provider. These 43 stakeholders share key service information and work hand in hand to help victims of domestic abuse.

Furthermore, we have set up a strong Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which has made considerable amounts of progress on delivering our Domestic Abuse Duty which came into force on 29th April 2021. The local Board has attendance and expert input from the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office as well as the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities.

We have taken the opportunity to talk and consult with victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including children, who must be recognised as victims of domestic abuse. We have asked them what they would like to see implemented in local services. This information has formed the basis of our local approach.

We have started work to secure Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation for our Council Housing Services. This will ensure that we have clear actions focused steps, in both our policies and practice to deliver the safest and most effective response for domestic abuse victims seeking help from the Council.

My Council has one of the most comprehensive Home Security Schemes, often referred to as a Sanctuary Scheme, which offers practical home security adaptations to secure properties for victims. The offer of help is for all residents, in privately owned, rented, Council or housing association properties. The Scheme provides an essential and practical offer of help for victims of domestic abuse and assists them to stay in their own homes. Something victims have told us they would prefer to do, where safe and possible.

Furthermore, in recent months we have undertaken a comprehensive audit and review of training for Officers and frontline staff to ensure that they are fully equipped to help victims. We have put in place Workplace Domestic Abuse Guidance to ensure that managers can recognise and spot the signs to help support staff members that maybe victims and in need of help.

A communications strategy together with regular press and social media posts has been rolled out. Together with information and ways to access help, which has been provided at Covid clinics and testing locations.

Building on my Administration's wider Equalities Strategy, this Domestic Abuse Strategy will further assist and drive my Administration's ambition and vision to embed a White Ribbon Plus approach. The Domestic Abuse Strategy recognises that whilst women are most likely to be the victims of domestic abuse 1 in 3 victims are male and therefore equality and access to services for all sections of our communities is vital. To build safer communities, services that meet the needs of male victims, LGBTQ+ victims and victims from a range of other protected characteristics is essential.

In addition to all this good work, we are active members of several national accredited programmes including the Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse (EIDA).

We are working towards DAHA (Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance) accreditation: which is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse.

We are exploring several other good practice and inclusive accreditation schemes including, UK Safe Spaces and Call for Action on Perpetrators. A workstream which shares research findings, best practice and drives national policy work on perpetrators. We are in talks with Ask for ANI which allows the use of nationally recognised stickers on office buildings to signal staff are aware of domestic abuse and can provide a room where victims can call helplines for support.

Whilst we are proud to say that our efforts have been commended by the National Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office, who have recognised the level of commitment and good practice being undertaken locally we still have more to achieve, we are not

complacent, to ensure we make the Borough a safe place for all victims. A vision underpinned by this Domestic Abuse Strategy, which will be presented tonight.

Last, but not least, in what has been a very difficult year I would like to thank each and every one of our staff, Councillors and residents for your incredible efforts and forbearance during this last year. I know it has been an incredible strain for now two years. Notwithstanding the pandemic we as a Council have achieved some remarkable outcomes of which we are rightly proud. It is an enormous privilege to be Leader of Council and I thank everyone for their support.

Lastly, Happy Christmas and a very prosperous, merry, healthy and successful New Year to everyone.

78. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

79. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

79.1 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities the following question:

Question

How was a contract awarded for a domestic abuse refuge service to a provider that doesn't have any domestic abuse provision?

Answer

Following a robust tender process, the contract for Wokingham Domestic Abuse was awarded to Cranstoun and commenced on 1st July 2021.

Domestic abuse is a priority area for the Borough and in recognition of this and increased demands on services in this area, Council funding for this contract has been significantly increased.

The provision of support for victims of domestic abuse is in place as required as part of the commissioned service.

Prior to launching the domestic abuse arm of the Cranstoun service Cranstoun committed 10 years to developing their current domestic abuse model. To do this cohesively they worked with Respect, Safelives, Domestic Violence Intervention Programme, Women's Aid, to name a few all of whom are key stakeholders within domestic abuse.

Cranstoun offer a fully integrated domestic abuse service in Barking and Dagenham, the County of Sussex, and Sutton all of which are well established. They also deliver victim and survivor work in the following areas, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Birmingham, West Midlands, West Mercia Police Force and 11 Boroughs and Sussex County. They have also won a fully integrated domestic abuse service in South Yorkshire.

This is a considerable reach across the country and one which demonstrates their capability to deliver a comprehensive domestic abuse service to Wokingham residents.

Supplementary Question

You sort of really did not answer my question and I am not sure that they actually have refuge places.

What I also wanted to know is that I understand that Cranstoun is supposed to be attending the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board meetings and the Executive meetings and it is my understanding that they have so far only attended one of these. So how is Cranstoun actually being held accountable?

Supplementary Answer

If I can just come to your first point about having a refuge within the Borough. What I can say is that no one will be left without support and a safe refuge in our Borough should they require it. We do have facilities to be able to house people who are in need of that refuge.

Let me just say that since 21st July, when Cranstoun took over, we have had no demand for a refuge place but that is not to say that there would not be in the future.

Also, I would like to say that when a company takes on a new contract you can hardly expect them to have a house in place ready to house people should they need one and we are actively looking for our own refuge rather than having to rely on outside bodies. But to actually do this I think you have got to also remember that domestic abuse unfortunately is not only about women it is about men and children as well. Therefore to find a suitable property to be able to house a mixed group is very difficult but we are working very hard to do that. Let me go back and say that yes there is availability for anybody who needs refuge, and they would not be denied in our Borough.

As for the meetings I will have to check on that for you as I have got no figures here as to whether they have attended the meetings or not and I will have to come back to you on that particular point.

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

Question

The Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Update states that the CPC at Wokingham took place between 9th and 17th November during which the Peer Team met with over 100 people comprising approximately 200 hours.

How many members of the public, parish and town councils were met and how many were staff/Members in this 200 hours?

Answer

During their visit the Peer Challenge Team held a wide range of meetings with residents, Members, staff, trade union representatives, partners, and town and parish councils. It is important to emphasise that the Peer Challenge Team itself led this review, independently and objectively, choosing which individuals and groups it wished to speak with in order to gain a rounded perspective of the Council.

In their feedback meeting to us on 17th November, the Peer Challenge Team reported that they had met 100 people over approximately 200 hours of work. The majority of the people the Team met were staff, as the Team asked to speak to a wide range from across the Council. Of course, many of our staff are also residents of the Borough.

There were eight, approximately one hour, meetings with Member groups, including a specific meeting with your Group Leader, Councillor Frewin, who also attended the feedback session on the 17th. Specific focus groups were also held with residents and town and parish clerks.

Supplementary Question

The report states that “the peer challenge approach involves a team of experienced officers and members from other local authorities”, etc, etc and it did go on to add that “the approach is valuable in identifying and addressing issues and challenges”, which I would recognise to be a good idea. “Local priorities and outcomes and how to make our overview and scrutiny function more meaningful and effective”.

This still gets back to my original question which was that I actually asked for specific numbers of how many opposition Councillors, parish and town councils, were included, as I was really interested in the number? Anyway, I welcome your answer

Supplementary Answer

I would just like to add that what I said before that the Peer Challenge Team made their own decisions on who they were going to meet. We do not have the full report yet so we do not know who they specifically met, and we may not know after the report because that was at their own discretion.

80. DOMESTIC ABUSE STRATEGY 2021 - 2024

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposed Domestic Abuse Strategy covering the period 2021-2024.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Communities informed Members that the Strategy had been delayed in order that the relevant parts of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 could be included within the Strategy. Councillor Soane thanked Karen Evans, the Domestic Abuse Co-Ordinator, for all her hard work in putting the Strategy together.

Laura Blumenthal highlighted the awareness training that was being made available to Council staff and stated that she was impressed that every month a training session, often delivered by specialist charities and groups, was set up covering domestic violence against various groups including, older people, LGBT victims and men. Councillor Blumenthal thanked Officers for establishing this learning culture about domestic violence and empowering front line staff to support domestic abuse victims. In addition, trauma training would be offered to staff in the new year which would assist them in spotting the signs of victim behaviours in relation to domestic violence so that victims could be provided with the support they needed.

Councillor Howe stated his surprise that 1 in 3 victims of domestic abuse were men. He highlighted the figures in the Foreword of the Strategy which stated that in the year ending 31st March 2021 1,479 women and 568 men in the Wokingham area had reported domestic abuse incidents to the police. Councillor Howe believed that the true number was actually 2,700 women and 1,500 men. This showed that the number of male victims was increasing and queried if it was known why this was? Councillor Soane responded that believed that the increase in the number of men coming forward to report domestic abuse may have always been the true figure but because the matter was now more openly discussed and the stigma of being a victim had gone away more men now felt able to report the fact that they had been victims of domestic abuse.

RESOLVED: That the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-2024 be approved so that it can be released for publication.

81. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE UPDATE

The Executive considered a report relating to an update on the initial findings of the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge.

The Leader of Council advised that the intention of bringing the report to the Executive at this stage was to appraise Members of the initial findings of the Peer Challenge, which had been a lot of work with the Team meeting over 100 people with 200 hours of discussion. Headlines from the feedback session highlighted that the Council delivered valuable, well-performing services that produced good outcomes for its residents. One of the issues highlighted by the Peer Challenge was the Council's engagement with the public, both by digital and physical means. The Council wished to work on this area at the earliest opportunity therefore a supplementary estimate of £150,000 was being requested. Councillor Halsall stated that the LGA's final report was due early in the new year.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the initial high level findings from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge that took place in November 2021 be noted;
- 2) a supplementary estimate of £150,000 to support the delivery of key actions arising from the review be agreed; and
- 3) it be noted that the finalised LGA CPC report and associated action plan will be reported to the January 2022 meeting of the Executive.

82. CROWN HOUSE LEASE

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to acquire a 5-year lease on the Crown House building situated on the Toutley Industrial Estate, Toutley Road, Wokingham.

The Executive Member for Finance and Resources went through the report and advised the meeting that during Covid the Council had seen a large increase in homelessness in the Borough. This coupled with the Council's commitment to remove all the rough sleepers from the streets and to allocate suitable accommodation had put considerable strain on the Council's resources and assets. Councillor Kaiser reported that it was planned to meet this need by delivering over 20 units of modular temporary accommodation, similar to those planned in Reading, and this would allow short term housing until permanent homes could be found. This was however not enough and therefore it was proposed to enter into a 5-year lease for 24 units at Crown House which would enable the Council to reduce expenditure by £163k per annum. which over the 5-year lease was a saving £815k. Currently the Council pays £436,800 per annum to use the same facilities and this would mean that the current nightly rate of £50 a night would be reduced to £32 a night, a 37% reduction. This would also enable the Council to ensure that there would be sufficient provision for urgent use and thereby reduce the need for expensive hotels. In addition this would also support the wider work to reduce the level of temporary accommodation.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the acquisition of a 5-year lease of the Crown House building, Toutley Road, Wokingham, at a cost of £275,000 per annum for the use as long-term temporary accommodation, be approved; and
- 2) it be noted that there is an option to renew the lease in WBC's favour for a further 5 years, at the passing rent at the end of the initial term.