

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 20 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.30 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Mayor), Abdul Loyes (Deputy Mayor), Sam Akhtar, Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Shirley Boyt, Prue Bray, Jenny Cheng, Rachel Burgess, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, John Halsall, Jim Frewin, Maria Gee, Guy Grandison, David Hare, Graham Howe, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Sarah Kerr, Tahir Maher, Charles Margetts, Adrian Mather, Andrew Mickleburgh, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Barrie Patman, Jackie Rance, Angus Ross, Daniel Sargeant, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle and Shahid Younis

Members in Attendance Virtually

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth, Anne Chadwick, Gary Cowan, Phil Cunnington, Carl Doran, Pauline Helliard-Symons, Morag Malvern and Simon Weeks

71. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Stephen Conway and Rebecca Margetts.

72. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

73. Declarations of Interest

The following Members declared a general personal interest relating to items on the Agenda:

Councillor John Halsall declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd.

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

Councillor John Kaiser declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Charles Margetts declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd.

Councillor Stuart Munro declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Wayne Smith declared a personal interest on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd.

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

Councillor Prue Bray declared a personal interest in relation to Agenda items 68 and 76 on the grounds that she was a trustee of Kaleidoscopic UK (a domestic abuse charity).

74. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members that the "No to Hate Crime" charter had been signed by 53 Members. The Mayor would be meeting with CLASP Wokingham to hand over the signed copies.

The Mayor also referred to the Mayor's Ball which was due to be held in March 2022. The Mayor thanked Members who had already made a donation and advised other Members that tickets were still available for the event.

75. Public Question Time

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

75.1 Philip Meadowcroft asked the Chairman of the Constitution Review Working Group the following question:

At the November 2021 Full Council Meeting, the Mayor, responding to a Members' query about the previous meeting's draft minutes, was advised by Democratic Services that the minuting of a written answer to a Supplementary Question (about Members' use of private email addresses raised at the September meeting) was not required because clause 4.2.9.9 "Written Answers" in the Constitution did not extend to written answers to Supplementary Questions.

The first two words of 4.2.9.9, which specifically deals with Written Answers, are "Any questions..." and I consider that the advice given to the Mayor, (which he duly endorsed and thereby dismissed the Member's query) was patently flawed.

To prevent this occurring again, in the interests of transparency and openness (otherwise written answers to Supplementary Questions will be hidden from both public and Members' view), will this Full Council Meeting tonight urge the Constitution Review Working Group to revise the wording of 4.2.9.9 to ensure that Democratic Services in future advises the Mayor and Leader of the Council (both of whom I trust, on reflection, will agree with me) that written answers to Supplementary Questions will be included in the minutes of the related meeting?

Answer

Resident participation in the work of the Council is at the heart of our approach and we strive to encourage transparency and openness. Section 3 of the Constitution sets out the various ways in which residents can participate – asking questions at a meeting of Full Council is just one of the many ways in which residents can get involved.

Dealing with your specific concern about the minuting of the answers to

supplementary questions, I do not agree with your assertion that the advice provided to the Mayor was flawed. Clause 4.2.9.9 applies specifically to substantive, written questions that cannot be dealt with during public question time, either because of lack of time, because of the non-attendance of the questioner or because of the non-attendance of the Member to whom it was to be put or because the Member answering the Question requires further information not available at the time, will be deemed to have been put, and shall be the subject of a written reply within seven working days to the person asking the question. The answer shall also be recorded in the Minutes of the meeting. However, this provision does not apply to supplementary questions, which can take longer to respond to, due to the often, complex nature of the subject matter.

Officers have researched your request further and confirmed that Wokingham's practice is consistent with other Berkshire authorities. However, I am prepared to bring your query to the Constitution Review Working Group so Members can give this further consideration.

Supplementary Question

There are elements of your reply that I appreciate, particularly what you said at the end. But most of it I found a remarkable complacent answer to a question which I think is quite straightforward. Therefore, I am not surprised that the Executive wants to spend £150k on market research to find out why Wokingham residents are not in raptures with the achievements of the Council. My supplementary question, therefore, is quite simple, and I have a reasonable expectation that you will answer this evening please. Is what you have said tonight, as Chairman of the Constitution Review Working Group, really, totally and completely consistent with the highest standards of conduct in public life, which Wokingham aspires to and mentions at least 10 times in the Constitution and in the standards set out in Chapter 9.2 Conduct: Appendix A – Principles and Appendix C – Practice? Yes or no Councillor Munro?

Supplementary Answer

No. I totally agree with you. That is why I said that we would take a look at it at the next meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group. Before I did the research it made sense to me, so I think it is worth looking at again. So that is the answer. The answer is yes.

75.2 Danny Errawalla asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Please can you give us an update on how the anti-poverty strategy is going?

Answer

Development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy is progressing well with an analysis of data having been undertaken prior to Christmas with an initial consultation of those who are struggling. Engagement of the wide voluntary and community sector is paramount to design and delivery of the strategy, and they have been engaged since September to develop a draft strategy. In late December we established a Hardship Alliance with four key VCS organisations to lead this work and focus on coordinating VCS engagement to informing the strategy and underpinning action plan.

There is a Cross Party Working Group which has been contributing to and engaged in development of the strategy throughout. This has enabled ongoing Member discussions and input to inform the proposals coming forward from within the Council and from our partners. Early engagement with the Town & Parish Clerks demonstrates a desire to be involved and consider how they are able to support projects in their local areas.

The strategy is now at a stage of going into public consultation for one month which will target members of the public, VCS organisations and Town / Parish Councils. Responses to this consultation will feed into the draft strategy and action planning, help to identify any gaps in proposals and widen engagement to other groups who would like to be involved.

Action plans are being developed in the Council and with our VCS partners, which will be built up over the next couple of months as engagement widens. The Anti-Poverty Strategy will be delivered through an annual action plan, refreshed each year, working towards the objectives of the strategy and able to build on previous years' actions.

Development of the strategy is currently on track for the Anti-Poverty Strategy to be launched following the local elections in May 2022.

Engagement with the VCS in developing the strategy has included:

- A series of meetings since September led by Citizen's Advice to gain initial input;
- Workshop on terminology to make language accessible and not stigmatising;
- Specific meetings with other forums and groups to gain early buy-in and input to form the draft strategy;
- Creation of a Hardship Alliance in December to be key partners: engaging with and leading the wider VCS;
- Ongoing work with the VCS through the Hardship Alliance to develop and deliver projects to tackle poverty.

We hope to make a considerable difference through this strategy.

Supplementary Question

Local charities do a lot to help people struggling financially. Please can you let me know how they have been involved in the creation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy?

Supplementary Answer

As I said, they are key to developing the strategy and play a substantial part on the working group which is taking it forward.

75.3 Juliet Sherratt asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

In the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 document, it is claimed that prevention is at the heart of the Strategy. However, there is only one sentence referring to prevention in the rest of the document. Please can Cllr Soane outline

how the strategy aims to prevent domestic abuse and put prevention at the heart of the strategy to reassure residents that this is not a hollow document?

Answer

Prevention is at the heart of the Domestic Abuse Strategy 2021-24 and can be found within the body of the Strategy document. The key priorities and detailed explanations which can be found on pages 16,17,34,35 and 36 explain the work that is being undertaken in relation to prevention including:

- Support educational settings to raise awareness of domestic abuse;
- Deliver training to enable domestic abuse to be identified and responded to;
- Encourage those who are causing harm as a result of their abusive and controlling behaviour to change;
- Tackle the root cause of domestic abuse, including seeking to break the cycle of abuse.

To ensure that we have a robust mechanism to drive change and deliver on our priorities, the strategy is underpinned by an action plan. This action plan is continually updated and reviewed at the two, bi-monthly domestic abuse meetings to review progress and address any blockers to achieving the aims.

The action linked to supporting educational settings is detailed below to provide reassurance that the actions are targeted and have set outcomes and measures.

The action plan, like the Strategy cover a three-year period commencing December 2021, so whilst all actions have been initiated and key agencies and measurements agreed some of the actions are currently in the early stages of delivery. Some will remain on the plan for the three-year period as they will be ongoing, other actions will be added to reflect new and emerging issues during this time period.

Supplementary Question

When I looked at pages 16, 17, 34, 35 and 36, I could only see a framework with heavy emphasis on action to be taken after the event of domestic abuse. My question was specifically about prevention. Given that the Conservative Councillors would not sign up to the White Ribbon campaign, which focuses largely on misogyny and preventing domestic violence, what will the Council sign up for as part of their campaign for prevention?

Supplementary Answer

As far as prevention is concerned, as I said at the beginning, it is at the heart of our Domestic Abuse Strategy and prevention is a key part of it. Therefore, actions we are taking will be before the event rather than after. That is our aim and that is where we will be making a considerable effort.

75.4 Annette Medurst asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question. Due to non-attendance, the following written answer was provided:

Wokingham Foodbank provides support for residents across Wokingham Borough by providing food and fuel support for households in crisis or in an emergency

situation. Wokingham Borough Council currently has 108 members of staff registered to make referrals into Wokingham Foodbank. In 2021, Council staff made 441 referrals for emergency food parcels and 68 referrals for emergency energy support vouchers (excluding Covid Local Support grant referrals).

Local Welfare Provision (LWP) is a financial assistance scheme run by the Council to help people who are in a crisis or emergency situation. Foodbank volunteers invariably find that Council employees are unaware that the LWP exists and don't know how to access these funds.

What is Wokingham Borough Council doing to ensure its staff are fully aware of LWP and how to access this help quickly and easily to best support residents, rather than always relying on local charities.

Answer

Teams within the council are aware of the LWP and details of this are also available on the website to help people access the support they need and are eligible for. There is always an opportunity for further promotion to make staff more aware of this.

Since the Household Support Fund was launched, provision for crisis support has been managed by Citizen's Advice through their 'One Front Door' for e.g., fuel payments.

The Council website is currently being updated to ensure that all staff have the latest information, including financial assistance available. In addition to this, as a part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, information on LWP is included in the list of available support (subject to eligibility criteria) that will be published alongside the Action Plan. As part of the strategy development, we are also:

- Reviewing the effectiveness of support / signposting including Wokingham's Local Welfare Provision Scheme;
- Consulting with residents and the voluntary sector to understand how those who need crisis assistance can be better supported;
- Enabling effective signposting of the scheme in conjunction with the voluntary sector;
- Ensuring residents in need of support can easily access support they need and the scheme: working to remove barriers to application;
- Providing frontline staff with training so that they are fully aware of the scheme, other support available and are able to advise residents on how to apply; and
- Reviewing the qualifying criteria and disclosure requirements for the scheme, ensuring that residents' dignity is respected throughout.

The LWP will also be further promoted internally via the intranet and staff e-newsletter to ensure all staff are aware of the LWP and how it can support residents.

This will not remove the need, or desire, for the Council to continue working with local charities to support those in need in the best way that meets their individual requirements.

75.5 Louise Timlin asked the Chairman of the Equalities Working Group the following question:

White Ribbon is a leading national charity, engaging with men and boys, aiming to end men's violence against women. They are working towards the culture change that is needed to prevent violence before it starts. Part of this is encouraging men and boys to recognise and call out harassment, sexist behaviour, microaggressions and misogynist "jokes", in order to promote equality and respect, and remove the cultural norms which enable the tolerance and excuse of men's violence against women in our society.

The four recommendations from the Equalities Working Group do not address these aims. Please could the leader of the Equalities Working Group state how Wokingham Borough Council intends to be a role model, and what concrete actions it will take to seek the culture change necessary to prevent men's violence against women?

Answer

All Councillors will soon be receiving an invitation to a workshop led by Dr Fiona Vera-Grey from Durham University, on public harassment and violence against women. Dr Vera-Gray is industry-leading and gave key guidance to the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. She will share with us policy recommendations and practical suggestions, including for culture change, to help us make Wokingham Borough safer for women.

You will notice in the report, that has come from the cross-party Equalities Working Group, that the Council is already talking to White Ribbon. The Leader of the Council, officers and I met with them – they are a fantastic organisation and we support them. We decided with them that the best way they could help us was giving training to our staff. We are not at the beginning of our culture change journey but advanced so don't need to rewind back to create an action plan and new committee (which White Ribbon accreditation would require and payment of a fee) to duplicate work that has already been done. You will also see in the report that we are seeking accreditation, just one that's more comprehensive and grades performance as that matches our culture change programme.

We are looking for White Ribbon to contribute to our established monthly domestic abuse training for frontline staff. This focuses on culture change and gives attendees the insights into violence against specific demographics. This doesn't just cover male violence against women but also how abuse can manifest, for example, against older people, men and those with disabilities.

We are also designing training for staff and Councillors on allyship and being an active bystander, which will help tackle street harassment and micro-aggressions. This will not just be for sexism and misogyny but goes further and will address the nine protected characteristics, including covering racism, homophobia and prejudice against disabled people.

Further afield, the Council has also worked with the police to train supermarket workers to support victims that go into stores and all major pharmacies in the

Borough have signed up to Ask for ANI, the scheme which alerts staff to taking someone to a safe space. We are working to roll out Ask for ANI to Council buildings, after staff are fully trained, so residents can access more safe havens. Working with partners such as the police and businesses in rolling out culture change is helping to create informed citizens who are equipped to help people who need it.

Supplementary Question

Do the members of this Council agree to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women and if not, why not?

Supplementary Answer

I think that is a question for everyone, not just me, but, obviously, I will be the one answering it. I think that it is up to every individual. I cannot answer on other people's behalf.

75.6 JB Staunton asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

The Ofsted rapid review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, published in June 2021 found that nearly 90% of girls and 50% of boys have been sent explicit pictures or videos of things they did not want to see. 92% of girls and 74% of boys said sexist name calling happens a lot. Children reported that sexual harassment is so commonplace they see no point in reporting it.

One of your four recommendations is to write to schools to ask how they are upholding the Department for Education's "Keeping Children Safe in Education" policy. This seems a rather passive recommendation. Addressing a sexist culture is essential in order to end men's violence against women, and clearly schools have a huge role to play in this.

Will you be making it clear to schools what best practice looks like and how will you be holding them accountable to implement these best practices?

Answer

There are many facets to this answer. The Berkshire West Children's Safeguarding Partnership (BWCSP) provides support and guidance to partners across the locality. Ofsted review their activity to support schools and partners in further developing practice has included supporting discussion and school self-evaluation to promote best practice, including:

- Education Act S175 Requirements: that is to support the annual school safeguarding audit process, using the NSPCC tool, to ensure schools comply with S175 of the Education Act 2003. The NSPCC tool has been updated this year to include a section on peer-on-peer abuse, and the results of this section will be analysed to identify any compliance gaps.
- The BWCSP widely shared with school headteachers and Designated Safeguarding Leads a document titled Local Advice on Harmful Sexual

Behaviour, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence that outlines the expectations on schools from September 2021 in relation to the statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2021).

- Discussion at Wokingham Education Safeguarding Engagement Group: In response to the DfE Letter to Safeguarding Partners regarding Sexual Abuse in School and Colleges, the Education Safeguarding Engagement Group discussed this topic on a number of occasions. As a result, headteacher colleagues have shared the resources (both specific training packages and safeguarding information) that they use in school with their staff.

Supplementary Question

Will you be telling schools about best practice and holding schools accountable?

Supplementary Answer

Yes. There is a letter, under my signature, to all school heads asking them to make sure that their policies are up-to-date and agreed by their governing bodies. You will understand that academies do not report to the local authority and we can only influence. We cannot command and control.

76. Petitions

The following Member presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated. The Mayor's decision as to the action to be taken is set out against the petition.

| | |
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| Rachel Burgess | Rachel Burgess presented a petition with over 650 signatures asking for a safe crossing for children from the Norreys ward who attended the Holt School. <i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Highways and Transport</i> |
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77. Council's Anti-Abuse Charter

The Council considered a report which proposed the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter. The report stated that the Council had worked with the local domestic violence charity Kaleidoscopic UK, to develop a Charter for all Members and Officers. The proposed Charter set out the Council's commitment to foster a deep-rooted culture and step change on violence and abuse.

Laura Blumenthal introduced the report and stated that the proposed Anti-Abuse Charter had the support of all the political groups on the Council.

Sarah Kerr expressed thanks to Vickie Robertson (founder of Kaleidoscopic UK) for her support in developing the Charter and nominated her for the Mayor's Role of Honour Award.

It was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Sarah Kerr that the recommendation in the report be amended to read:

“That the Council approve the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter and produces a report on progress to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee at least twice a year”.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposed amendment was approved.

It was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Sarah Kerr that the recommendation in the report, as amended, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the amended recommendation was approved.

RESOLVED: That the Council approve the adoption of a local Anti-Abuse Charter and produces a report on progress to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee at least twice a year.

78. Council Tax Base 22/23

The Council considered a report relating to the Council Tax Base for 2022/23. The Council tax Base was the total number of Band D equivalent dwellings liable for Council Tax after discounts and exemptions. Setting the Council Tax Base would enable each precepting body to set their Council Tax budgets for the year ahead.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Abdul Loyes |
| Laura Blumenthal | | |
| Chris Bowring | | |
| Shirley Boyt | | |
| Prue Bray | | |
| Rachel Burgess | | |
| Jenny Cheng | | |
| Peter Dennis | | |
| Lindsay Ferris | | |
| Michael Firmager | | |
| Paul Fishwick | | |
| Jim Frewin | | |
| Maria Gee | | |
| Guy Grandison | | |
| John Halsall | | |
| David Hare | | |
| Graham Howe | | |
| Clive Jones | | |
| Norman Jorgensen | | |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | |

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| John Kaiser | | |
| Sarah Kerr | | |
| Tahir Maher | | |
| Charles Margetts | | |
| Adrian Mather | | |
| Andrew Mickleburgh | | |
| Stuart Munro | | |
| Gregor Murray | | |
| Barrie Patman | | |
| Jackie Rance | | |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |
| Ian Shenton | | |
| Imogen Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Caroline Smith | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |
| Shahid Younis | | |

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

79. Council Tax Reduction Scheme 22/23

The Council considered a report on the proposed adoption of a Localised Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS). The scheme would ensure that all working age Borough residents who may experience financial difficulties in paying their Council Tax liabilities have access to local assistance, offering financial help.

Rachel Burgess stated that funding for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had reduced steadily since 2013, when Council Tax benefit was abolished, and there remained a number of additional levers which could be applied to increase the number of people receiving support.

Maria Gee stated that the impact of the looming cost of living crisis would result in more residents struggling to pay their Council Tax. She suggested that the scheme be referred to the Anti-Poverty Working Group as part of a joined-up approach to helping the most vulnerable residents.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Shirley Boyt |
| Laura Blumenthal | | Prue Bray |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Chris Bowring | | Rachel Burgess |
| Jenny Cheng | | Peter Dennis |
| Michael Firmager | | Lindsay Ferris |
| Jim Frewin | | Paul Fishwick |
| Guy Grandison | | Maria Gee |
| John Halsall | | David Hare |
| Graham Howe | | Clive Jones |
| Norman Jorgensen | | Sarah Kerr |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | Tahir Maher |
| John Kaiser | | Adrian Mather |
| Abdul Loyes | | Andrew Mickleburgh |
| Charles Margetts | | Ian Shenton |
| Stuart Munro | | Imogen Shepherd-Dubey |
| Gregor Murray | | Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey |
| Barrie Patman | | Caroline Smith |
| Jackie Rance | | |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |
| Shahid Younis | | |

RESOLVED That:

- 1) a local CTR scheme for 2022/23 be adopted on the same basis as the 2021/22 scheme;
- 2) the full disregard currently allowed for War Widows and War Disability Pensions be continued from 1st April 2022 in respect of the Prescribed and Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Housing Benefit schemes;
- 3) funds be made available to the Hardship Fund, known as Section 13a (S13a) scheme, for those who cannot pay their Council Tax liabilities;
- 4) Members note the linkages to the broader Anti-Poverty Strategy of both the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the S13a Scheme.

80. Treasury Management Mid - Year Report 2021-22

The Council considered a report which provided a summary of the Treasury Management operations during the first six months of 2021/22. The report gave details relating to the two elements of Treasury performance: debt management which related to the Council's borrowing and cash investment which related to the investment of the Council's cash balances.

Imogen Shepherd-Dubey stated that the contents of the Treasury Management Reports appeared to change from year to year. This made it difficult for the layperson to understand the Council's true financial position.

John Halsall referred to the Council's sound financial position and thanked Members and Officers who had worked hard to achieve this position, especially in light of the many challenges faced over the past two years.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Prue Bray |
| Laura Blumenthal | | Peter Dennis |
| Chris Bowring | | Lindsay Ferris |
| Shirley Boyt | | Paul Fishwick |
| Rachel Burgess | | Jim Frewin |
| Jenny Cheng | | Maria Gee |
| Michael Firmager | | David Hare |
| Guy Grandison | | Clive Jones |
| John Halsall | | Sarah Kerr |
| Graham Howe | | Tahir Maher |
| Norman Jorgensen | | Adrian Mather |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | Andrew Mickleburgh |
| John Kaiser | | Ian Shenton |
| Abdul Loyes | | Imogen Shepherd-Dubey |
| Charles Margetts | | Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey |
| Stuart Munro | | Caroline Smith |
| Gregor Murray | | |
| Barrie Patman | | |
| Jackie Rance | | |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |
| Shahid Younis | | |

RESOLVED That Council note:

- 1) that the Treasury Management Mid-Year report was considered and agreed by the Audit Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 30 November 2021;
- 2) that all approved indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy have been adhered to;
- 3) 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's residents.

- 4) that, 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.

81. Procurement of External Audit

The Council considered a report which set out proposals for appointing the external auditor to the Council for the accounts for the five year period from 2023/24.

It was proposed by Daniel Sargeant and seconded by John Kaiser that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Abdul Loyes |
| Laura Blumenthal | | |
| Chris Bowring | | |
| Shirley Boyt | | |
| Prue Bray | | |
| Rachel Burgess | | |
| Jenny Cheng | | |
| Peter Dennis | | |
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| John Halsall | | |
| David Hare | | |
| Graham Howe | | |
| Clive Jones | | |
| Norman Jorgensen | | |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | |
| John Kaiser | | |
| Sarah Kerr | | |
| Tahir Maher | | |
| Charles Margetts | | |
| Adrian Mather | | |
| Andrew Mickleburgh | | |
| Stuart Munro | | |
| Gregor Murray | | |
| Barrie Patman | | |
| Jackie Rance | | |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |

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| Ian Shenton | | |
| Imogen Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Caroline Smith | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |
| Shahid Younis | | |

RESOLVED: That the Council agree the preferred approach to appoint the external auditor for the accounts for the five year period from 2023/24, as recommended by the Audit Committee on 30 November 2021 of using the sector-led body, the PSAA, by indicating an option to “opt-in”.

82. Appointment of Town/Parish Council Representative on the Standards Committee

The Council considered a report relating to the appointment of a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee. The Committee had been holding a vacancy for one of its three Town/Parish representatives.

The process for appointing the Town/Parish representative had been overseen by the Monitoring Officer and one of the Council’s Independent Persons. Each of the Borough’s Town and Parish Councils were invited to submit nominations for the role. Four candidates were then interviewed for the position.

It was proposed by John Kaiser and seconded by Daniel Sargeant that Councillor Sheena Mathews (Earley Town Council) be appointed as a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was approved.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sheena Mathews (Earley Town Council) be appointed as a Town/Parish Council representative on the Standards Committee.

83. Appointment to Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

The Council considered a report which gave details of the resignation of Councillor Anne Chadwick from her appointment to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. As a result, the Council was requested to appoint a Conservative Group Member in Councillor Chadwick’s place.

It was proposed by Angus Ross and seconded by John Halsall that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote the proposal was approved.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Alison Swaddle be appointed as one of the Council’s representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

84. Timetable of Meetings

The Council considered the proposed timetable of meetings for the 2022/23 Municipal Year, set out on Page 89 of the Agenda.

It was proposed by John Halsall and seconded by John Kaiser that the proposed Timetable of Meetings for 2022/23 be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Abdul Loyes |
| Laura Blumenthal | | |
| Chris Bowring | | |
| Shirley Boyt | | |
| Prue Bray | | |
| Rachel Burgess | | |
| Jenny Cheng | | |
| Peter Dennis | | |
| Lindsay Ferris | | |
| Michael Firmager | | |
| Paul Fishwick | | |
| Jim Frewin | | |
| Maria Gee | | |
| Guy Grandison | | |
| John Halsall | | |
| David Hare | | |
| Graham Howe | | |
| Clive Jones | | |
| Norman Jorgensen | | |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | |
| John Kaiser | | |
| Sarah Kerr | | |
| Tahir Maher | | |
| Charles Margetts | | |
| Adrian Mather | | |
| Andrew Mickleburgh | | |
| Stuart Munro | | |
| Gregor Murray | | |
| Barrie Patman | | |
| Jackie Rance | | |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |
| Ian Shenton | | |
| Imogen Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey | | |
| Caroline Smith | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |

RESOLVED: That the proposed Timetable of Meetings for 2022/23 be approved.

85. White Ribbon Motion

The Council considered a report which referred to Motion 469, submitted to the November 2021 meeting by David Hare. The Motion proposed that the Council seek White Ribbon Accreditation, promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment of women a crime and ask schools, academies and colleges to develop clear policies and education to prevent public sexual harassment.

At the November Council meeting, the Motion was referred to the cross-party Equalities Working Group for consideration and a report back to full Council. The report stated that the Equalities Working Group had met on 6 January 2022 and agreed a number of recommendations which were set out in the report.

It was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Shahid Younis that Recommendation 2) in the report be amended by adding the following words:

“...and provide a report on their findings to a meeting of the Executive”.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposed amendment was carried.

It was proposed by Sarah Kerr and seconded by Rachel Burgess that the recommendations in the report be amended as follows:

“Recommendation

That Council note the update and agree the recommendations of the Equalities Working Group and the revisions (**in bold**) below:

- 1) Council explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims **and how it is taking action to bring about the culture change required to end male violence against women;**
- 2) Council Officers explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision and provide a report on their findings to a meeting of the Executive;
- 3) **Council will also seek White Ribbon Accreditation for the organisation in the next 6 months which goes well beyond domestic violence and works to eliminate ALL male violence against women;**
- 4) the Leader of the Council write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change, and write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and the PCC to encourage them to also support this **and lobby ministers;**
- 5) the Executive Member for Children’s Services write to local schools on how they

are upholding the Department for Education’s September 2021 “Keeping Children Safe in Education” policy on public sexual harassment **and to ask them, if they haven’t already, to develop a clear policy on it separate to their bullying policy and ask them to include education to prevent public sexual harassment as part of their PSHE education.**”

Councillor Kerr stated that the recommendations in the report relating to tackling domestic violence were welcomed and supported. However, in her view, they did not address the wider cultural issue of tackling male violence against women and girls.

It was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Pauline Jorgensen that the meeting be adjourned for 10 minutes to enable Members to consider Sarah Kerr’s amendment.

Upon being put to the vote the proposed 10 minute adjournment was agreed.

On the resumption of the meeting, Laura Blumenthal confirmed that she did not accept the proposed amendment.

Upon being put to the vote, voting on the amendment was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Shirley Boyt | Sam Akhtar | Keith Baker |
| Prue Bray | Parry Batth | Abdul Loyes |
| Rachel Burgess | Laura Blumenthal | |
| Peter Dennis | Chris Bowring | |
| Lindsay Ferris | Jenny Cheng | |
| Paul Fishwick | Michael Firmager | |
| Jim Frewin | Guy Grandison | |
| Maria Gee | John Halsall | |
| David Hare | Graham Howe | |
| Clive Jones | Norman Jorgensen | |
| Sarah Kerr | Pauline Jorgensen | |
| Tahir Maher | John Kaiser | |
| Adrian Mather | Charles Margetts | |
| Andrew Mickleburgh | Stuart Munro | |
| Ian Shenton | Gregor Murray | |
| Imogen Shepherd-Dubey | Barrie Patman | |
| Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey | Jackie Rance | |
| Caroline Smith | Angus Ross | |
| | Daniel Sargeant | |
| | Wayne Smith | |
| | Bill Soane | |
| | Alison Swaddle | |
| | Shahid Younis | |
| | | |

The Mayor declared that the proposed amendment was lost.

It was proposed by Laura Blumenthal and seconded by Shahid Younis that the recommendations in the report, as amended, be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, the voting was as follows:

| For | Against | Abstain |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Sam Akhtar | | Keith Baker |
| Parry Batth | | Shirley Boyt |
| Laura Blumenthal | | Prue Bray |
| Chris Bowring | | Rachel Burgess |
| Jenny Cheng | | Peter Dennis |
| Michael Firmager | | Lindsay Ferris |
| Jim Frewin | | Paul Fishwick |
| Guy Grandison | | David Hare |
| John Halsall | | Clive Jones |
| Graham Howe | | Sarah Kerr |
| Norman Jorgensen | | Abdul Loyes |
| Pauline Jorgensen | | Tahir Maher |
| John Kaiser | | Adrian Mather |
| Charles Margetts | | Andrew Mickleburgh |
| Stuart Munro | | Ian Shenton |
| Gregor Murray | | Imogen Shepherd-Dubey |
| Barrie Patman | | Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey |
| Jackie Rance | | Caroline Smith |
| Angus Ross | | |
| Daniel Sargeant | | |
| Wayne Smith | | |
| Bill Soane | | |
| Alison Swaddle | | |
| Shahid Younis | | |

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Council explore how it can improve communications to residents on what it is doing to support domestic violence victims;
- 2) Council Officers explore whether there is a more comprehensive accreditation to certify at which level the Council is performing when it comes to domestic violence provision and provide a report on their findings to a meeting of the Executive;
- 3) the Leader of the Council write to the Home Secretary in support of making public sexual harassment a specific offence and impress the need for wider cultural change, and write to the four MPs that cover Wokingham Borough and the PCC to encourage them to also support this;
- 4) the Executive Member for Children’s Services write to local schools on how they are upholding the Department for Education’s September 2021 “Keeping Children Safe in Education” policy on public sexual harassment.

86. Member Question Time

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

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

The Council's plan to tackle climate change contains the following:

- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions from transport;
- Create a local plan that specifies net zero construction and infrastructure;
- Increase the levels of carbon sequestration the Borough through greening the environment;
- Engage with young people and support sustainable schools;
- Encouraging behaviour change.

Part of the Arborfield Green (Garrison) planning permission was to provide two primary schools for the new occupants and had the developer not agreed planning permission would have been quite rightly refused by the Planning Department.

When the primary school was nearing completion Wokingham Borough Council's Children's Services agreed to shut Farley Hill School and moved it in its entirety to the new school location at Arborfield Green, even calling it Farley Hill Primary School, so denying children living directly outside the gates of the new school access.

As a result of this decision all the primary school aged children in Arborfield Green have to be driven to surrounding primary schools while many who attended Farley Hill now have a much longer drive to the new school

How does this fit in with the five bullet points in the Council's plan to tackle climate emergency?

Answer

At a strategic level our planning for the Borough's Strategic Development Locations (or SDLs) has been underpinned by principles of creating sustainable communities that can sustain local access to services and amenities whilst minimising the need to travel. This is also underpinned by sustainable transport options both within and between SDLs and with existing main town centres. As you rightly point out, ensuring primary school provision to meet future anticipated need within these new communities has always been a key priority and, although pre-dating our climate emergency, fully in line with the principles of sustainable development by reducing the need to travel and minimising carbon impact.

Of course, in detail at any one point in time changing the overall pattern of primary provision and seeking to balance demand versus school places available across the system will never be an exact science and there will always be some anomalies. It is anticipated that these will reduce over time as these new communities mature.

For many years the Farley Hill Primary School has been one of two schools serving the homes associated with the Arborfield Garrison and what is now the Arborfield Green and associated Finchwood Park areas. Relocating the Farley Hill Primary School to this site means that children living in these areas (the majority of the children on roll) attending the school have the opportunity to walk, scoot or cycle to the school. Previously only the very small number of children living in Farley Hill Village itself could easily travel to the school sustainably. The relocation has therefore significantly reduced school run traffic and this reduction has had a beneficial impact on reducing CO2 emissions. In addition, it is proposed that the school expands to a full two forms of entry and, as the enlarged school grows, increasing numbers of children from the area immediately around the school will be admitted. Again, overall, the number of children with the opportunity to walk to school, rather than be driven, will increase.

The new school premises could not open as a new school in 2021, as there was insufficient local need to ensure that all local schools, including potentially both the Farley Hill Primary School and the Coombes CofE Primary School, in the Arborfield ward, could remain financially sustainable. Conversely, relocating the Farley Hill Primary School enabled significant numbers of children from the former Arborfield Garrison, Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park areas to benefit from a school they could walk to at the earliest opportunity. It also addressed the long-standing issue of some undersized classrooms in the original Farley Hill School building.

Supplementary Question

I think I would challenge that. The planning regulations are, if they said no we are building the school there, the school would not be there and neither would the houses. On top of the utter stupidity of denying children access to a school where the child lives directly opposite the gate, how does the Council square the Climate Emergency circle when other departments approve trees being cut down, including trees with TPOs to facilitate development and also approve development that allows extra vehicles on roads which the Council already recognises as being over capacity.

My question is: should all Council departments be promoting the Climate Emergency aims or is it ok to ignore them when a few houses are in the offing?

Supplementary Answer

There is a mix of disciplines in there. I am responsible for Children's Services and schools. What I would say is that we are making changes and we are undertaking consultations in order to change catchment areas in order to make it more walkable to those schools, to make them more accessible. I would also say that, from a point of education, we have had a programme for 18 months to put solar on schools. It is part of the school curriculum. The curriculum is set by the School Commissioners, as schools are academies. So we cannot command what the curriculum will be. We are trying to influence that by bringing down the cost of electricity very visibly. There are other motions in play as well.

86.2 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

In Charvil village, I have had some issues with graffiti and have attempted to get this

removed. However, I have been informed by the Council that their policy is to only remove graffiti which is offensive. Can you confirm why this policy is in place and if the Council will consider changing the policy to include non-offensive graffiti in order to keep our Borough graffiti free?

Answer

I too put this to our teams in relation to graffiti because we had an issue like this in Woodley. I was given the same answer, i.e. that they concentrate on removing offensive graffiti first. Within a short amount of time the graffiti I was referring to, which was not offensive, was removed.

The amount of graffiti around the Borough is not extensive, but it is there and we do have a team to deal with it. I think that we do a good job and to concentrate on moving offensive graffiti first is a must. I do take the point that all graffiti should be removed at some point, and it is. I know that the team is working to get this done.

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

When is the safety audit on Woodward Close entrance expected to be finished and the safety problems of the entrance finally fixed for the residents?

Answer

The safety audit was completed in November and comments from the auditors confirmed that there is no safety issue with the ramp. The purpose of the raised table is to highlight the busy shared use crossing and slow traffic down as they get across. The ramp up should not be changed as this is what dictates drivers' behaviour to slow down. The speed limit is 30mph and drivers are expected to slow down as they manage the turn into Woodward close.

The down ramp in its current state does not cause a safety issue. However, we acknowledge that the down ramp from Reading Road to Woodward Close appears slightly more abrupt than others in the area and some drivers have reported experiencing a greater bump as a result. This aspect has been raised with the contractor and we are having ongoing discussions with them to find the best way to remedy this reported problem.

A site meeting has been held with the WBC Project Manager for the scheme with Councillors Paul Fishwick and Prue Bray to discuss this problem and what options are available to remedy it. I attended later and talked to the officer after the site meeting. It is quite obvious that the road dips down towards the hump which is what is causing the problem. The road surface is also not good enough in my view. There is a crack down it which is, I think, exacerbated by water and the recent cold weather. The Project Manager is hoping that the fix will be carried out in the first quarter of 2022. Obviously, this is dependent on the weather. If it is wet or frozen they will not be able to resurface and they are going to have to resurface part of the road. It is in hand and I assure you that it will be done. If you have any more questions, feel free to contact me.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for doing something for the residents. I would like to understand why the Health and Safety audit took so long. If, apparently, it was available in November, no one seemed able to find it in December at all. Just curious.

Supplementary Answer

To be honest, I have not seen the safety audit. The fact that it said that it was not a safety issue probably explains why I didn't see it. But, as I reiterate, the problem is actually the way in which the road attaches itself to the hump and the various angles. There is definitely a problem and, therefore, we will get it fixed.

86.4 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Lilly May Court is an affordable development in my ward under a shared ownership arrangement. It has emerged that these properties weren't constructed in accordance with planning conditions and mitigation intended to reduce the impact of noise from haulage yards was not installed. Furthermore, a covenant regarding the yards and the mitigation wasn't disclosed at the point of sale.

When residents complained to their provider about intolerable noise and pollution from the haulage yards, they were treated with contempt and told that they were 'not allowed' to complain about the hauliers and should 'keep their windows closed'.

It has finally been accepted that a breach of planning has taken place and the provider is now pressurising the residents to accept the mitigation. However, the majority of residents would never have bought into these properties had they been given the full facts at the point of sale and have requested the properties are bought back by the provider, who has refused.

The provider, Housing Solutions, is a 'Preferred Registered Provider' of WBC, so my question is - what pressure can WBC exert to encourage this provider to buy back these flats to enable these families to move on with their lives?

Answer

As you are aware, the Council has been in close contact with the residents of Lily May Court and Housing Solutions, and we are committed to doing all we can to improve their living conditions.

We have ensured that the developer is in a position to retrospectively take steps to comply with the original planning conditions to mitigate against noise. We have served Notice on the haulage company adjacent to the dwellings to ensure that the best practicable means are taken, at all times, to minimise the escape of dust from the site and minimise air pollution. We have also installed air quality monitoring equipment adjacent to the property to ensure that the air quality is suitable, and we'll be getting the results of that monitoring at the end of January.

It would not however be appropriate, nor possible, for the Council to interfere with the contractual position between the residents and the Housing Association who are the joint owners of the properties.

We would be happy to explore and discuss with Housing Solutions the future management options of these properties given the issues, whilst not wanting to interfere with the contractual agreement with residents.

I would also add that we will be reviewing all the registered providers, this year, who provide affordable homes in the Borough and this will be one of the issues on the table.

Supplementary Question

As a member of TLIP I know that our housing officers provide a very high level of service, especially when it comes to listening to tenants and resolving complaints. They also conduct regular monitoring via the Star survey. It seems to me that we set a higher standard for ourselves than we do for preferred providers. Shouldn't all the Borough's tenants, residing in affordable social housing, irrespective of the provider, have the same expectations?

Supplementary Answer

I fully agree with you. In fact the registered providers should have a head start on us as they are supplying brand new homes. We are putting tenants into older properties. We manage to maintain 100% decency and, yes, it is a question that will be asked of them when we speak to them again. We cannot do much more – our hands are tied. An interesting fact of life is that everyone goes on – the Liberal Democrats go on - about building 300,000 homes each year. The Labour Party goes on about 250,000 homes. At the end of the day, that has not happened since councils were stopped from building homes.

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

Could you give me an update on the situation with 6th Form provision in the South of the Borough?

Answer

The Wokingham South School Planning Area is served by six schools, four of which have sixth forms. These co-educational sixth forms are accessible to residents across the area, and all have been judged to be "good" by Ofsted. Students from this area also choose schools and colleges outside the Borough, despite having choices in the area. However, the Council is keen to see an expansion of post-16 provision in south Wokingham for which there is strong local support. I know that you are one of them.

The Bohunt School Wokingham is keen to provide this expansion. The Post-16 element of the Secondary Strategy is now the focus for consultation. We hope to have that finished soon. Notional funding to enable post-16 expansion will be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan which is coming before Executive in February.

86.6 Shahid Younis asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Now most of our schools in WBC are academies and as such beyond WBC control. What are you doing in Children's Services to ensure our children are properly educated?

Answer

Academies fall under the remit of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and DfE, most of them not under local authorities. In order to operate in this complex landscape effectively, investment in partnership working is important. At a local level for WBC, this means that we have regular discussion with national partners such as Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC), Ofsted and DfE. These discussions are to review outcomes and manage any concerns regarding provision which would then be taken forward by the appropriate agency. These meetings usually involve WBC Officers. However, Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also met with representatives from RSC Office and DfE to pose questions and seek assurance on performance, and any related actions being taken by those with direct responsibility for the academies inside the Borough.

Since I have taken up post as Lead Member in May 2021 it has become clear that a strengthening of the strategic partnership working across schools with the Local Authority would be beneficial. The days of command and control by local authorities are long over. The responsibility for children in the Borough is joint with schools. The heads of schools know, first-hand, the needs of children and their guardians in their communities and we need to have a close, partnership engagement to understand needs, form strategies and make change for the better.

Therefore, the Wokingham Borough Education Partnership has been formed with membership from early years, primary and secondary level heads. The first meeting at the end of January. This partnership will strengthen vision, strategy and collaborative working with all Wokingham schools.

86.7 Sarah Kerr asked the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Communities the following question:

It's now more than 6 months since Cranstoun were awarded the domestic abuse contract. Have Cranstoun finally got a refuge set up yet?

Answer

Since being awarded the contract in July 2021, Cranstoun have been working hard to deliver on all aspects of the Wokingham Domestic Abuse Commissioned contract.

The Council's Commissioning Team and Community Safety Team are working closely with Cranstoun to monitor progress through frequent performance monitoring meetings to ensure that any identified issues or challenges are resolved and brought in line with the requirements of the commissioned contract.

There has been no reduction or change in the offer of refuge support for victims of domestic abuse. Those victims who have come forward and contacted the Council requesting refuge space have been offered a place. Support for victims whilst they are in safe accommodation is essential and this also continues to be delivered.

Negotiations for a local property continue to be undertaken as a priority by Cranstoun. This will ensure that an additional local refuge to add to the existing local provision is brought online as soon as possible. Cranstoun have commissioned a property sourcing expert to provide specialist advice in response to the urgency of the matter.

We can reassure victims of domestic abuse, who may need or require emergency accommodation and may be considering approaching the Council for help, that they will continue to be assisted.

Supplementary Question

I think that the answer was no. I have had residents getting in touch with me as they are concerned about the award of this contract and the lack of refuge provision from the contract provider. With a view to holding them to account and having visibility, could I have a copy of the tender document they submitted? I appreciate that there may be some sensitive information in there which could be removed. My residents are concerned and I would like to see what they promised and where they are in delivering it.

Supplementary Answer

You have to appreciate that when a contract is awarded with an item such as providing a refuge to be part of that contract and is not already there, they have to find a property. To find a property that is suitable for the type of needs of people seeking refuge is not easy. We have not denied anybody refuge. If there has been any need for assistance in safe accommodation we will always be there to do that. There is availability of refuge in the Borough. We are still working with Berkshire Women's Aid who are providing that facility. So we are not denying anybody a safe solution and we will continue to do that. I am quite happy to request that suitable parts of the contract tendering process are made available. I will check with Democratic Services if it is ok to let you have a copy.

87. Continuation of the Meeting

At this point in the meeting, 10.04pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), the Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. The Motion was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Sarah Kerr.

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

88. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

88.1 Clive Jones asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

A resident of Hawkedon ward has asked me why the Council has paid for a party political letter to be posted to residents. They were, of course, referring to the letter which was sent out by you, with your home address and your home phone number, indicating where the letter had come from, not the Borough Council. Was the letter and its design approved by the Council's Local Plans Team? I assume that they were not involved in the drafting of a political letter. Were the Council's Communications team involved in the creation of the letter? Again, I assume not

because of the political nature of the letter, but I would like confirmation of this.

The letter also refers to the Liberal Democrats supporting a target of 800 new homes in the Borough each year locally. You know this is untrue. Liberal Democrats have consistently, for five years, talked about an absolute maximum of 600 new homes each year in the Borough.

Will you apologise for these errors and will you confirm that the costs of this party political letter are being borne by the Conservative Party and not by the Council Taxpayers of Wokingham.

Answer

No. The letter was drafted by the Local Plan Update team in conjunction with the Communications team and it is and was to ensure that we got a good response to the Local Plan Update consultation. At the time that we wrote it, the consultation was quite thin and now, I am pleased to say, the consultation is quite adequate, so it will pass muster at the Inspection in Public.

It is quite interesting how you are able to extract stuff which is not there. The Liberal Democrat manifesto, and I believe that you Lib Dems are part of a national party, or have you disassociated yourselves from that as well, said that 300,000 houses a year. So the statement which is that the Government has set a national target of 300,000 homes within its manifesto and the Liberal Democrat manifesto, per year, is absolutely correct. So, I am absolutely baffled by the question.

As Leader of the Council I do represent the Council and it is all the Council. I am perfectly entitled to put my name to documents which come from the Council and I should put my name to documents which come from the Council, because I take responsibility. Interestingly enough, the Lib Dems don't because they keep on abstaining from everything which requires responsibility. If you are in this seat Clive you have to take responsibility. You cannot avoid that. I don't and yes I am responsible for the Local Plan Update consultation and yes I have done everything I can to ensure that the response to the consultation is sound and will pass muster.

I think that you should do me the courtesy of listening to me instead of talking to someone else.

Note: Under Paragraph 4.2.13.14 of the Constitution, Clive Jones raised a point of personal explanation. Councillor Jones stated that the question had not come from him. It had been asked on behalf of a resident in Hawkedon ward. Councillor Jones understood that other residents were also asking about this issue.

88.2 Shirley Boyt asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

Community bus services, such as Keep Mobile and Readibus, are a lifeline for many residents. They enable the elderly and those with disabilities to maintain their independence and prevent social isolation. Occasionally the drivers of these minibuses have to park the vehicle up in order to pick up a resident who needs assistance or has lost track of time. When this happens they have to park wherever

they can.

Recently, a Keep Mobile bus was given a parking ticket in the Crockhamwell Road car park. I believe that there needs to be a designated parking bay in at least one of the four Woodley car parks. I think the cost benefits of maintaining the independence of these residents will surely outweigh the cost of losing a couple of parking bays. Would the Executive Member for Highways and Transport please give serious consideration to this request?

Answer

Yes, we will give consideration to it. I think the thing you have to think about in restricting spaces and only allowing them to be used by disabled buses is that, when a disabled bus is not there, nobody can use the space, including other disabled drivers. So, in reality, I think that I would prefer to look at a disabled space that a disabled bus can use rather than a bus designated space. I will certainly look into it.

88.3 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

We know that there were a number of issues with the 2021 Christmas Market held at Cantley. Visitors reported disappointment that the ice rink was in fact plastic and only suitable for small children. The Council had to offer refunds and amend advertising. There were also vacancies at the stalls which, we understand, the Council was renting at £200 per day. The Lib Dems have been asking about the financial results since before Christmas. Could the Council confirm what the profit or loss was from this event?

Answer

No I can't at the moment, but I will get back to you.

Parry Batth, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure stated that the Christmas Market was a small scale, well-intentioned venture that was to help local businesses as well. We offered the reduced rate of zero cost for these businesses. Covid and the weather didn't help. I am due to meet the officers next week (the officers responsible for organising the event are currently on leave). I do intend to sit down and review the whole event with the officers to identify some learning points. I will then feed-back to you.

88.4 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Could I ask, on behalf of a resident of Hawkedon ward, for an update on the situation of the BME Forum?

Answer

It is a very good question. We have run the BME Forum for many years as a Council. We are determined that we should not be running the BME Forum. It should be run by the members of the Forum. Since we went to the Forum and said please tell us what you want and how you want to organise yourselves, we have not had tangible results. But, we are still pressing for it and we are still pressing to resuscitate it with

what is probably a very different demographic mix compared to when it was set up 20/30 years ago, or whenever it was. So, the BME Forum is still in existence, it is dormant for the moment, we are trying to resuscitate it and, hopefully, we will.

88.5 Paul Fishwick asked the Executive Member for Highways and Transport the following question:

I am sure that we all want to see school students walking and cycling to school safely. However, the Council's policy on not salting signed cycle routes has resulted in many students coming off their bikes and injuring themselves on their way to Wheatfield and Forest schools in Winnersh on Tuesday morning, when air temperature fell to -3 with widespread ice. These incidents have dented the confidence of many students who are now asking parents to drive them to school. What actions will the Executive Member take to make cycling safer on these dedicated cycling routes?

Answer

I believe that we may have discussed the gritting of cycle routes recently, maybe a couple of meetings ago. At the time I was told that there wasn't sufficient cycle usage to be able to grit them and for them to remain safe. What happens is, if you grit something and no one uses it for a while, it actually freezes over again. So, if you could give me the precise route, I can get someone to assess whether there is enough traffic to make gritting work. Just send me an email.

88.6 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

The proposed 3G pitch in Earley, a consultation with residents is needed before the planning application. Please could you assure me that a consultation is going to be carried out before any planning application is submitted and that all potential sites as well as Laurel Park, have been assessed as to their suitability and a written scoring system is recorded.

Answer

The answer to your question is yes. There will be consultation. I have had discussions with Councillor Hare on this matter as well. We will listen to all the consultation feedback and act on it. The consultation will take place.

88.7 Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Will you please tell me when you will improve the paths in Winnersh Meadows country park so that differently abled people and people with prams can actually use them. They are too muddy to be used during the winter. It needs some type of material so that people can actually move on it.

Answer

I will definitely look into that.

89. Imogen Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Environment

and Leisure the following question:

I am asking again about the Christmas Market. During December the Christmas Market was held at Cantley Park, with a skating rink. It was paid for with public money, as Councillor Bishop-Firth discussed. My residents are concerned about why this location was chosen and the viability of such a project – it was a mile out of town and it seems that, if public money was used for such an event, it should have been used for maximum effect.

People are wondering why the event was not in Wokingham town centre where it could have existed symbiotically with town centre businesses and increased footfall into the town. Other concerns about the rental charges for the huts which were impossibly high for many local businesses to use.

I have asked several times for a copy of the business plan and the decision making around the Christmas Market, but I have yet to see one. Can you please advise on the decision process relating to holding the Christmas Market in this location and why this information is not openly available to Councillors or the public.

Answer

I have already explained that. I answered the question from Rachel Bishop-Firth. It was a small scale well-intentioned venture. We tried this location. It was a trial. We have held events like that in the town centre before. We thought that Cantley Park would be a better place. There is a café nearby that we want to promote as well. I am meeting with officers next week. We will review everything and act on the learning points.

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

Last year there was a significant problem with children getting into the Pigott School. At one point there were 58 children in the catchment area that were not able to be accommodated. Fortunately, due to a lot of work and agreement with the school these children were accommodated. What are the plans to ensure that this does not happen again?

Answer

Yes, there was a problem last year. It is really to do with planning. So, this coming year, there are less places available, until we put in place extra provision for Year 7. Part of the problem with the Pigott School relating to Twyford, Wargrave and surrounding area is not just a question of entry into Year 7, but through their career in the school. You will see in the Medium Term Financial Plan, to be presented to the Executive next month, that we are making provision for that.

91. Statements by the Leader of the Council, Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members

Due to time constraints, this item was not considered.

92. Statement from Council Owned Companies

Due to time constraints, this item was not considered.

93. Motions

93.1 Motion 472 submitted by Rachel Burgess

Due to time constraints, this item was not considered.

94. Motion 473 submitted by Guy Grandison

Due to time constraints, this item was not considered.

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