



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS
FOR THE PERIOD**

11 JANUARY 2022 to 7 MARCH 2022

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

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 16 March 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 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.45 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliar-Symons (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Rachel Burgess, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Norman Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Parry Batth, Gary Cowan, Lindsay Ferris, Gregor Murray and Shahid Younis

Officers Present

Laura Buck, Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager
Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Andrew Collins, Specialist Climate Emergency Officer
Rhian Hayes, Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Place
Francesca Hobson, Service Manager, Green & Blue Infrastructure
Steve Moore, Interim Director, Place and Growth
Will Roper, Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager
Grant Thornton, Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place
Callum Wernham, Specialist, Democratic and Electoral Services

13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Paul Fishwick and Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey.

Lindsay Ferris attended the meeting as a substitute.

14. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to:

Minute 19 – Anti-Poverty Strategy – the final paragraph being amended to include the following statement:

“In relation to the co-production of the strategy, it was highlighted that not all VCS partners feel like they are properly engaged and have a seat at the table to write and develop this strategy. It was confirmed that this would be happening going forward and a member or members of the VCS will be present at subsequent scrutiny meetings where this is on the agenda”.

Minute 20 – Unlawful Encampments – add new Resolution 5) as follows:

“5) the Committee receive further information on the outcome of national consultations relating to unlawful encampments”.

15. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

17. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

17.1 Gary Cowan asked the Chairman the following question:

Agenda item 63 – Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Question

On carbon savings, the report states over the last year Wokingham Borough Council has worked in setting the ground to deliver projects that will increase the generation of renewable energy across the Borough....

And also the following:

My Journey completed summer and winter competitions in primary schools, and are currently running a film competition for secondary school students; but goes on to say that there are no new actions for this section.

My question is then: why did this Council create a situation where children who live In Arborfield Green, including those living directly opposite the new school gates were not allowed to go there and they have all had to be driven to other primary schools miles away from where they live. How will this achieve carbon saving?

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 towns. 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.

With regard to Arborfield Green, 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. In theory, relocating the Farley Hill Primary School would enable 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.

There has never been any intention that the new school would accommodate all the children living in the garrison area. In all, ninety children living in the garrison area were admitted to Wokingham primary schools in 2021 – accommodating all of them in a new school would have effectively wiped out the intake to a number of schools.

In more detail, the decision to build the new school was taken before the pandemic, when experience in Shinfield was that new housing could lead to rapidly rising rolls. The intention was to avoid children having to be driven to school. It became apparent in 2020 that demand was unlikely to increase to a level to make a new school viable (as a stand-alone school) or, if it had been filled and so was viable, the significant fall in the rolls of other schools would have threatened their viability.

A significant contributor to this lack of demand was the cessation of house building in the early part of the pandemic. Therefore, the decision was taken to relocate Farley Hill school with a phased expansion from the current 30 places per year through 60 to 90, in line with the the expected growth in the number of families in the area currently served by Farley Hill and the Coombes.

So, although the plan is to expand the school to offer 60 places from 2022, there is no expectation that all garrison area families will be accommodated (as is clear in the November 2021 report to the Executive) and there was no expectation that this would be the case in 2021. Indeed, the January 2020 Executive paper was clear that expansion above 30 places hinged on the impact on the Coombes.

Incidentally, I share your concern, as do headteachers. As a former Executive Member for Children's Services and a former deputy head I am well aware that without a minimum number of children no school can be financed and, therefore, cannot function.

You may be interested to know that the newly formed Education Partnership, which includes 10 headteachers and the Director of Children's Services, are going to discuss school places at the first meeting at the end of January.

Supplementary Question

Thank you very much, that is actually very helpful. The point really is that, if the developer had submitted a plan to build 2,000 houses on Arborfield Garrison and stated that he was not going to provide a primary school for the occupants of those houses the Council, quite rightly, would have refused that planning permission. So, it is very clear that the purpose of building that school was to accommodate the children on the garrison, for obvious reasons. The developer marketing those houses achieved sales because he offered a school on site – children could walk or cycle to school. This is all very "green" and is actually laudable.

My question is, how can the Council justify what you have just said and how does it bode for future large-scale developments? History shows that the Council cannot be trusted to deliver on the promises made, particularly on this site.

Supplementary Answer

I think that the essence of supplementary the answer was contained in my first answer. I will highlight that part.

A school can only be viable if it has sufficient numbers of children. Otherwise, it does not attract the finances. If you put all the children into one school in an area, that has an impact on surrounding schools which, of course, we do not want to undermine. As for the Climate Emergency, everything is a balance. Yes, we are committed to it but, at the same time, we are committed to keeping existing schools open. Nothing is as straightforward as we would like it to be, unfortunately. The fact is that the Council is aiming to support all primary schools, not just one at the expense of another.

18. Q2 2021-22 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 82, which gave details of performance management for the period July to September 2021 (Quarter 2). The report gave details of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which measured how each service was delivering against its current objectives.

Steve Moore (Interim Director, Place and Growth), Will Roper (Customer Insight Analyst and Performance Manager) and Shahid Younis (Deputy Executive Member, Insight and Change) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report included 46 KPIs which were intended to be SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely), taking into account historic trend information and benchmarking. The KPIs were assigned a RAG status (Red for on target, Amber for close to target and Red for missing the target).

The following KPIs were reported as Red for Quarter 2 of 2021/22:

- KPI AS1: Social work assessments allocated to commence within 7 days of the requests (counted at point of allocation).
- KPI AS4: Safeguarding timeliness – concerns completed within 2 working days.
- KPI AS7: Proportion of people receiving long term care who were subject to a review in the last 12 months.
- KPI RA3: Usage of Wokingham Leisure Centres.
- KPI RA4: Participation in leisure activities to support those who may be experiencing social isolation.

The report gave details of the corrective action being taken to address these Red KPIs. Of the five Red KPIs it was confirmed that the three adult social care indicators were deliberately stretching with the intention of driving improvement in the service. The other two Red KPIs related to the leisure service and reflected the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The report also stated that five KPIs had moved from Amber to Green whilst one KPI had improved from Red to Amber.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

Children's Services Challenges (page 22 of the Agenda) – Recruitment of qualified Educational Psychologists creating a capacity issue impacting on EHCP assessment performance. It was suggested that this issue should be referred to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny for further consideration. It was agreed that this issue would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee as part of its forward programme.

CS6: Percentage of 16/17 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (Page 41) – this was a new indicator replacing the previous indicator Percentage of Care Leavers who were NEET. That indicator had set a target of 52% compared with the new target for all 16/17 year olds of 97%. It was queried why the original indicator had been

archived without reference to the Committee. It was felt that the KPI should have the same target for care leavers as for all other children. It was confirmed that the Interim Director of Children's Services would be happy to discuss this and other KPIs highlighted by Members. The process for identifying KPIs was also confirmed. This involved discussion between Directors and the relevant Assistant Directors, followed by agreement with the relevant Executive Member.

RA8: Capital Budget Monitoring Forecast Position (Page 54) – the indicator was reported as -3.69% against a target of +/- 1%. Consequently it was suggested that this indicator should have a RAG status of Red not Green, as reported. It was confirmed that this indicator would be checked.

Top 3 Wins – In relation to the format of the report, what was the process for identifying "Top Wins"? As an example (Page 20), two of the three Top Wins were not related to any KPIs. For example, the Top Win on Climate Emergency referred to activity that had taken place – the activity was only relevant if it led to a carbon reduction. The activity in Top Wins should be linked to measurable impact. It would be useful if the Top Wins and Opportunities were linked to the relevant KPIs. It was confirmed that KPIs only gave part of the story relating to a key priority. Other aspects were highlighted in order to give a wider picture and context. This include challenges relating to performance and service risks.

AS7: Proportion of people receiving long term care who were subject to a review in the last 12 months (Page 38) – performance against this indicator was consistent but had been below target for several years. Was this a SMART indicator? It was confirmed that the target was deliberately stretching in order to drive service improvement. The service was aiming for excellence.

PG21: Percentage of waste recycled from the kerbside (Page 51) – what were the reasons for the above-target performance of the service? Did it relate to the collection of food waste and the additional cardboard arising from deliveries during the pandemic? It was confirmed that the service had been working hard to engage with residents and encouraging greater levels of recycling. The collection of food waste had also been successfully delivered. The emerging Waste Strategy would pick up these themes and emphasise the waste hierarchy – reduce, reuse and recycle.

RA2: Occupancy rate of WBC-owned regeneration units (Page 52) – the indicator had moved from Green to Amber. Were there any issues relating to the letting of these units? It was confirmed that a number of deals were in the pipeline which would bring the RAG status back to Green.

AS1: Social work assessments allocated to commence within 7 days of the requests (Page 37) – concern was expressed at the reported vacant posts in the assessment team and their potential impact on the service. It was confirmed that the service was working on a recruitment and retention strategy and a workforce plan. Short term planning was in hand, but there remained longer term national challenges relating to the adult social care sector.

Report format – the Committee had previously discussed the amount of detailed information in the report and options to enable more focussed scrutiny. It was reported that a new reporting system and report format would be available for 2022/23. This would deliver more timely reports and enable Members to submit questions in advance the Committee meeting. This, in turn, would enable the relevant Executive Members and officers to be invited to attend the meeting.

Top Win: Reduction in the number of residents in B&B temporary accommodation (Page 23) – Officers were congratulated on the reported reduction in the use of B&B accommodation. It was confirmed that the Council had secured long term contracts with providers which reduced reliance on B&B. This was better for the residents and a much cheaper option for WBC.

PG13: Proportion of Highways Infrastructure Schemes on track for delivery (Page 50) – In Q1 two roads had been highlighted – the South Wokingham Distributor Road and the Western Gateway. These schemes had been reported as Red in Q1 but were now reported as Green. There was no explanation for the change in RAG status. Could the Committee be provided with an explanation for the change in RAG status and an explanation of how progress on these delivery schemes was measured and reported? It was confirmed that this information would be provided for the Committee.

Top Wins – WBC activity in response to the Climate Emergency – Dinton Activity Centre showcased at COP 26 (Page 20) – It was confirmed that COP 26 took place in Q3 not Q2. Could more detail be provided re activity in Q2?

Top Wins – Completed retender and route optimisation of the Home to School service (Page 24) – it was felt the problems which arose during this process and the impact on some families questioned its inclusion as a Top Win. It was confirmed that this was a big project which had produced a number of learning points which would be used to improve service delivery in the future. In that sense it could be described as a Top Win.

CIC8: Number of fly-tipping incidents (Page 44) – could WBC encourage the Government to increase the maximum fine for fly-tipping from the current level of £400? It was confirmed that WBC was one of the most proactive Councils in relation to fly-tipping. Progress continued to be monitored by the cross-party working group. As part of the reorganised public protection service a WBC anti-social behaviour team would be introduced. The new team would provide an increased focus on environmental crime. It was suggested that consideration be given to developing a KPI relating to the number of prosecutions for fly-tipping in the Borough.

Shahid Younis (Deputy Executive Member) commented that work was ongoing to refine the KPIs to be reported to the Scrutiny Committees. It was suggested that the new list of KPIs for 2022/23 be reported to the Committee for discussion and comment.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Steve Moore, Will Roper and Shahid Younis be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions;
- 2) the Q2 Performance Monitoring Report (July-September 2021) be endorsed;
- 3) further information be provided to Members in relation to the specific points and questions raised at the meeting.

19. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

The Committee considered the six monthly update to the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 82.

The report gave details of highlights relating to each section of the Action Plan, along with deliverables planned for the next three months and new actions added to the Action Plan.

Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Residents Services, Communications and Emissions), Rhian Hayes (Interim Assistant Director, Housing and Place), Grant Thornton (Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place) and Andrew Collins (Specialist Climate Emergency Officer) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that, within the Borough-wide aim to achieve Net Zero, the Council aimed to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030. A breakdown of the Council's emissions in areas such as heating, business travel and waste was included in the report. 2021 was the first year in which these figures had been fully accounted for.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Action Plan was noted in areas such as public transport usage, which had still to recover to pre-Covid levels.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

Electric vehicle charging points (Page 70) – further information was requested on the location of EV charging points (on-street and at public car parks) and the way in which they were funded. It was confirmed that a report had been submitted to the Executive recommending that a pilot scheme be introduced (supported by Government funding). Installing charging points at on-street locations was more challenging than off-street. Over 30 potential locations for on-street charging points were being explored across the Borough. Members would be consulted on the potential sites.

Local Plan Update (Page 77) – confirmation was sought that the supplementary planning guidance underpinning the updated Local Plan would include a commitment to net zero development, clean energy generation and maintenance of trees. It was confirmed that the Local Plan Update would have to comply with the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – the Government's planning policies and how they should be applied. The Council had the power to set standards for carbon neutral buildings but needed to be aware of the impact, for example additional building costs. Further information would be provided for Members on the Council's powers to require solar panels on new homes.

The report (Page 69) referred to Transport as one of the key sectors contributing towards emissions in the Borough. Two of the most important targets in the Action Plan related to reducing the number of cars on the road and the distance travelled by residents. Yet there was little in the report on these two issues. It was confirmed that the report was the six-monthly update. There would be much more detail in the annual update report, submitted to Council in July. In the meantime, officers confirmed that a more detailed update on the Transport elements of the Climate Emergency Action Plan would be submitted to the February 2022 meeting of the Committee.

In relation to Engagement and Behaviour Change (Page 79), how would subject experts engage with residents taking part in the ongoing deliberative processes? It was confirmed that the deliberative processes, now badged as "Let's Talk Climate", would include video evidence submitted by relevant subject experts. Having viewed the experts' evidence, residents would then meet again to discuss ideas, supported by an independent facilitator. Ideas developed through the deliberative processes would then be submitted to Council for discussion. Council would decide which ideas should be subject to further investigation

and carbon budgeting. These ideas would then go back to Council for a final, public decision on which ideas to include in the Action Plan.

Based on the information currently available, was the Borough on track to achieve Net Zero by 2030? It was confirmed that, currently, there was a gap between the forecast position and Net Zero. The aim was to reduce this gap as new ideas and projects came forward over the next few years.

The report (Page 69) referred to the London Road trial installation of a 1,321metre stretch of plastic kerbing with a carbon saving of 40,555kg. How did the use of plastic kerbing deliver this level of saving? It was confirmed that the use of recycled plastic kerbs (instead of concrete) delivered a saving through a reduction in manufacturing, transport and construction. It was confirmed that further information would be provided on the methodology for achieving the carbon saving and how this fitted into the Transport section of the Action Plan.

In relation to the retrofitting of domestic properties, it was suggested that EPC ratings should be used to measure success. It was confirmed that the Government target of achieving EPCs of C or above by 2025 for all newly rented properties was reflected in the Council's targets.

Waste and Recycling (Page 76) – was the target of 80% recovery of wet paper achieved? It was confirmed that this target was met. Further information on the recovery of wet paper would be circulated to the Committee. It was also noted that the emerging Waste Strategy would build upon recent initiatives to deliver on the waste and recycling goals in the Action Plan.

Renewable Energy Generation (Page 72) – had the Barkham Ride solar farm now received the go-ahead? It was confirmed that further information would be circulated to the Committee on the current status of the project.

In relation to Transport, it was noted that car usage had returned to levels seen before the pandemic whilst public transport usage was still well below pre-pandemic levels. Increasing the usage of public transport would be a key element in delivering the targets in the Action Plan.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Gregor Murray, Rhian Hayes, Grant Thornton and Andrew Castle be thanked for attending the meeting to present the update report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the six month update on the Climate Emergency Action Plan be noted;
- 3) further information be circulated to the Committee in relation to the points and questions raised by Members;
- 4) a further update report on progress against Transport targets in the Action Plan be submitted to the February 2022 meeting of the Committee.

20. TREE STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 83 to 90, which gave details of the emerging Tree Strategy for the Borough. The Strategy would provide improved

direction for tree management and guide the Council's approach to trees across the Borough.

Fran Hobson (Service Manager, Green and Blue Infrastructure) and Laura Buck (Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the Tree Strategy would set out how the Council would manage its statutory responsibilities for trees and woodlands (including Council-owned trees), replanting policy, new planting schemes (including the 250k tree Climate Emergency project) and woodland management. The strategy would also cover the issues relating to the maintenance of newly planted trees in new development locations.

An early engagement survey had been carried out in November 2021 with the aim of gathering views from residents and other stakeholders about the key areas to be addressed in the strategy. The report gave details of the priorities identified in the survey, including species diversity, community involvement, preference for planting schemes, maintenance of newly planted trees and the creation and management of woodlands.

The report set out the proposed timeline for developing and agreeing the Tree Strategy. It was anticipated that the draft Tree Strategy would be ready for review in July 2022 with the aim of publishing the agreed strategy in January 2023.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

What was the process for residents to express an interest in planting a tree in their garden? It was confirmed that residents should contact Laura Buck at WBC – laura.buck@wokingham.gov.uk

Information was also set out on the Council's Engage platform.

The report referred to the establishment of a cross-party working group to steer the content of the Tree Strategy, with a suggested first meeting in February 2022. What was the process for identifying Members to sit on the working group? It was suggested that all Members be offered the opportunity to join the working group after liaison with the Group Leaders.

An important issue was the effective maintenance of new trees planted by developers. This was highlighted by residents in the early engagement survey. It was confirmed that the service was looking to recruit two additional officers which would increase capacity to address this and other issues. The Tree Strategy would also focus on this issue including the maintenance programme for the 250k tree Climate Emergency project.

Whilst the emerging Tree Strategy was welcome, it was too late for many new development sites in the south of the Borough where developers had not maintained newly planted trees and common areas. It was confirmed that lessons learned from these developments would be addressed in the Tree Strategy. A key issue was closer working relationships with Town and Parish Councils and local community/voluntary groups.

Recent incidents involving the loss of trees raised the question of the enforcement powers available to the Council. It was confirmed that the Council did have enforcement powers set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, for example through the use of Tree Preservation Orders. Anyone contravening a TPO was guilty of an offence and could be

fined. It was important to communicate the Council's powers to the relevant interested parties.

The 2019 Estate Infrastructure Task and Finish Group made a recommendation relating to the maintenance of newly planted trees. This would see the Council taking on the responsibility for maintenance, to be funded by a commuted sum. It was confirmed that progress against this recommendation would be investigated.

It was requested that the draft Tree Strategy be reported back to the Committee for comment before its submission to the Executive. It was confirmed that the draft strategy would be submitted to the Committee.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Fran Hobson and Laura Buck be thanked for attending the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions;
- 2) the results from the Tree Strategy early engagement survey be noted;
- 3) the timeline and milestones for the emerging Tree Strategy be noted, with the request that the timeline be shortened if possible;
- 4) the draft Tree Strategy be submitted to the Committee for comment before consideration and approval by the Council's Executive.

21. TREE PROTECTION & BIODIVERSITY TASK & FINISH GROUP - UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 91 to 96, which gave details of progress made by the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group.

The report stated that the Task and Finish Group had been approved by the Committee in July 2021. The Group met for the first time in late August 2021 and agreed its terms of reference which were set out in the report. The terms of reference were subsequently amended to include discussion of the November 2021 Council Motion on the potential declaration of an Ecological Emergency.

The report stated that the Task and Finish Group had been established in line with the political balance arrangements. Councillor Chris Bowring had been elected Chairman at the first meeting.

The Task and Finish Group had met several times and held discussions with a number of witnesses including WBC officers, Town and Parish Councils and the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. The Group had also considered a case study relating to the loss of circa 450 mature trees at Bearwood Lake.

The report stated that the Task and Finish Group would continue to meet with a view to submitting its final report to the Committee in February or March 2022. The Group's recommendations on the Council Motion relating to the declaration of an Ecological Emergency would be submitted to full Council for consideration.

In the ensuing discussion Members raised the following points:

The Task and Finish Group terms of reference referred a review of best practice. Could this include best practice from other countries? It was confirmed that this point would be discussed with the Task and Finish Group.

A suggested witness for the Task and Finish Group was a representative from the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). It was confirmed that BBOWT would be contacted about joining a meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the progress report on the work of the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group be noted;
- 2) any evidence or details of potential witnesses for consideration by the Task and Finish Group be submitted to Neil Carr in Democratic Services.

22. DEVELOPMENT OF THE O&S WORK PROGRAMMES FOR 2022-23

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 97 to 102, which gave details of the process for developing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes for 2022/23.

The report stated that, in line with best practice, the work programmes would be developed between January and March 2022 on the following basis:

January/February – initial consultation with Overview and Scrutiny Members, Executive Members, senior officers, partner organisations, Town and Parish Councils, residents and community/voluntary groups;

March – final work programmes to be agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee;

April – publication and implementation of the work programmes.

Members highlighted the need for separation of meeting dates in the Council calendar to enable time for comments/recommendations from the Committee to be included in reports to the Executive.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the process for developing the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes for 2022/23, as set out in the report, be approved;
- 2) the 2022/23 work programmes be approved at the Committee's meeting in March 2022;
- 3) each Overview and Scrutiny Committee carry out one or more detailed Scrutiny reviews during 2022/23;
- 4) future versions of the draft Council Calendar of Meetings be submitted to the Committee for comment before approval by full Council.

23. EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME AND INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme and the Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programme, as set out at Agenda pages 103 to 112.

RESOLVED That the Executive and Individual Executive Member Decision Forward Programmes be noted.

24. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme and that of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as set out on Agenda pages 113 to 124.

The Chairman advised Members that an extraordinary "Call-In" meeting of the Management Committee would be held on Tuesday 8 February at 7.30pm.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Programmes be noted;
- 2) the report of the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group be added to the Management Committee's Forward Programme.

25. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 125 to 128.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Action Tracker report be noted;
- 2) the Chairman write to the Chief Executive in relation to setting up meetings with the Executive and CLT as per the Executive-Scrutiny Protocol.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring (Chairman), Angus Ross (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Stephen Conway, Carl Doran, Pauline Jorgensen, Andrew Mickleburgh, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Bill Soane

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Peter Dennis and David Hare

Officers Present

Connor Corrigan, Service Manager - Planning and Delivery
Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage, and Compliance
Lyndsay Jennings, Senior Solicitor
Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Case Officers Present

Joanna Carter
Baldeep Pulahi
Simon Taylor

63. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Gary Cowan and Rebecca Margetts.

64. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 December 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

65. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Bill Soane stated that he had listed item number 69, application number 213520, as residents have raised concerns regarding access to and from the proposed development site. Bill added that he had an open mind with regards to the proposal and would consider it purely based on its planning merits, what is said at the Committee meeting by the parties and by the members of the Planning Committee.

Andrew Mickleburgh stated that Earley Town Council's Planning Committee had considered item number 70, application number 213457, who had made a recommendation of refusal. Andrew added that he had not taken any part in that particular discussion or vote, and had not formed a view with regards to this application.

66. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

No applications were recommended for deferral, or withdrawn.

67. APPLICATION NO.203544 - LAND TO THE WEST OF ST ANNES DRIVE AND SOUTH OF LONDON ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40 1PB

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 supplementary agenda pages 3 to 4.

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

Peter Dennis, Ward Member, commented on the item. Peter stated that the minutes of the previous meeting made note of impact on the visual amenity should the proposals go ahead, and Peter felt that this should be reflected in the reasons for refusal. Peter added that this area was indicated as greenspace within the Southern Development Land Opportunity, which went against the principle of the SDL.

Joanna Carter, case officer, stated that one of the agreed reasons for refusal stated that the adverse impact on protected trees and the loss thereof would also lead to the adverse impact on the visual amenity of the green route and the local area.

RESOLVED That the additional reasons for refusal as set out on page 4 of the supplementary agenda be agreed.

68. APPLICATION NO: 212350 - THE SAPPHIRE CENTRE, FISHPONDS ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG41 2QL

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of a new 3No storey commercial building following partial demolition of existing building and reconfiguration of site to include additional parking

Applicant: Apacor Ltd

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 17 to 56.

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

- Amendment to condition 12;
- Updated paragraph 30 in relation to car parking.

Tom Sadler, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Tom stated that the applicant was the owner and occupier of the premises, and manufactured a range of diagnostic equipment which were key in the fight against Covid-19. Tom added that the company was at critical capacity and required additional space in order to increase production capabilities. Tom stated that the proposals were in accordance with planning policy, and the quicker the extension works could be carried out the better outcome for everybody.

Carl Doran queried whether any additional jobs would be created or lost as a result of the proposals, and queried the height of the surrounding buildings. Baldeep Pulahi, case officer, stated that there were no proposed changes to the numbers of full time equivalent staff. Baldeep added that given the context and location of the area, the increase in building height of the proposal would not be a detriment to the surrounding area.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried where the intended entry and exit points would be located as this may have implications on the location on the bin storage area, in order to allow refuse vehicles to be able to exit the site without the need to reverse onto Fishponds Road. Baldeep Pulahi confirmed that the bin storage was secured by condition, and the final location had not been finalised and the ease of collection would be a consideration when deciding this. Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage, and Compliance, stated that some swept path analysis had been provided, and the site would be serviced via a private refuse collection service. Chris added that the likely location would not be too dissimilar to now, and the refuse vehicles currently reversed into the site.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey queried how many local apprentices would be employed at the site. Baldeep Pulahi stated that these details would be secured by the employment skills plan.

Angus Ross queried why the proposals included an additional 27 car parking spaces whilst staff numbers were not proposed to increase. Chris Easton stated that the proposed increase in car parking spaces complied with the typical use for a B2 use case. Tom Sadler commented that the proposals would not lead to any loss of staff, and there were possibilities to increase staffing number once the expansion had been approved and completed. Tom added that the additional car parking space would future proof the site.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey commented that she was pleased to see the site being retained as an employment space.

Stephen Conway commented that he was not in favour of any restrictions to the number of employees allowed to work on the site. Stephen added that he was pleased with the proposals, and felt that the building was located in a sustainable location and the proposals were in keeping with the surrounding area.

RESOLVED That application number 212350 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 18 to 25, and amended condition 12 as set out in the Supplementary Planning Agenda.

69. APPLICATION NO.213520 - 99 COLEMANS MOOR ROAD, WOODLEY

Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 2 no. three bedroom dwellings with associated parking, following demolition of the existing dwellinghouse.

Applicant: David and Carol Row

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 57 to 92.

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

Andy McKinnon, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Andy stated that the road where access was proposed was not adopted, and residents paid for the upkeep of the road. Andy added that there was no footpath to the property as shown within the planning documentation, where a grassed area was situated. Andy stated that residents' main objection was in relation to the increased construction traffic which had never been planned for in addition to increased vehicle movements via the creation of two properties which could accommodate 5 vehicles.

Baldeep Pulahi, case officer, commented that condition 4 required a construction management plan in the event of approval of the application.

Bill Soane stated that construction vehicles parked on Colemans Moor Road during the development at the rear which had caused chaos, and residents feared that this may continue with the approval of this application. Bill added that the bus stop had been moved during the construction phase of the development to the rear of the application, and queried whether this could occur should approval be granted for this application. Bill queried how construction vehicles would access the proposed site. Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage and, Compliance, stated that the development to the rear was much larger in scale which resulted in the bus stop being temporarily relocated. Chris stated that rights of access to the private road was a civil matter, and added that construction management was secured by condition.

Pauline Jorgensen queried whether there was any significance to the 3rd room being classed as a study rather than as a bedroom. Baldeep Pulahi stated that all rooms including the study met space requirements for a bedroom, and it was not reasonable to condition the room to be kept as a study. Baldeep added that the scheme in front of the Committee was based off of the plans as submitted. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Planning and Delivery, stated that the studies could be converted into a bedroom, and the properties had sufficient car parking to meet the standards should the applicant or future owners wish to do so.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey suggested that the future owners strongly consider joining the association to contribute to the upkeep of the road, should the application be approved.

Stephen Conway commented that the planning application was for two dwellings, and access to a private road was a civil matter. Stephen added that the Committee had to judge the application based on its planning merits.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried whether Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) could be challenged by the owners of the private road for granting planning permission where access was not controlled by WBC, and queried what was meant by the statement that notice (certificate B) had been served to the developer of Loddon Gardens in relation to access requirements. Lyndsay Jennings, Senior Solicitor, stated that the NPPF was clear that development should only be refused on highways grounds if there was an unacceptable impact on highway safety, and the ability to actually access to and from this development site was a private issue as it was a private road. As such, it was very unlikely that WBC would become involved in a private civil matter. Baldeep Pulahi stated that certificate B had been serviced as it was a private road and the developer did not own the road.

Andrew Mickleburgh sought confirmation that the access road was no narrower than similar residential roads to enable safe reversing into the properties, queried why sustainability measures were suggested rather than committed to, and queried whether an energy statement should be required for a development of this scale. Chris Easton stated that the proposed parking bays would be off of the carriageway, and the design was not atypical from other similar developments. Chris added that the Highway Code suggested that road users reversed in to their driveways. Baldeep Pulahi clarified that the scale of the development did not require an energy statement. Baldeep added that sustainability measures had been suggested and were subject to building control regulations, and there

was no policy available to enforce such measures over and above what the applicant wished to provide.

Andrew Mickleburgh proposed an informative encouraging the applicant to follow through with the suggested sustainability measures. This was seconded by Carl Doran, carried, and added to the list of informatives.

Carl Doran commented that many properties in the area were two storeys rather than three storeys, and queried what the heights of surrounding properties were. Baldeep Pulahi stated that the proposals were higher than that of existing properties to the west, however the proposals would complement the dwellings within the Loddon Garden development. Baldeep added that the front elevations were not south facing, and therefore the height was comparable to other dwellings and would therefore not be detrimental to the character of the area. Bill Soane commented that the nearby Bridges Resource Centre was three storeys in height.

RESOLVED That application number 213520 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 58 to 64, and additional informative encouraging the applicant to follow through with the suggested sustainability measures as resolved by the Committee.

70. APPLICATION NO.213457 - LIBERTY HOUSE, STRAND WAY, LOWER EARLEY

Proposal: Full planning permission for the erection of three 2No storey buildings each comprising of six apartments (18 in total), together with associated ancillary development, hardstanding, landscaping and footpaths

Applicant: Mrs Kate Bessant

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 93 to 140.

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

- Correction to the expiry date to read 17 January 2022;
- Detailed clarification in relation to the proposal seeking 6 of the 18 units as affordable, rather than the 100 percent mentioned within the report;
- Amendment to part A of the recommendation to delete the reference to 100 percent affordable housing.

Alf Wojtasz, neighbour, spoke in objection to the application. Alf stated that there were a total of 16 objections from residents living in proximity of the proposed development in addition to an objection lodged by Earley Town Council, whilst there were no submissions of support. Alf was of the opinion that the designs were out of character and the stylistic context did not resemble the existing housing stock in the local area or that of Liberty House. Alf added that the roof designs were of cross gable design and not box gable design like other houses locally. Alf added that Liberty of Earley House was a purpose built house for multiple occupation, and was of the opinion that the new development resembled houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) and not a home such as Liberty of Earley House. Alf stated that the proposals were inconsistent with the housing stock in the area, however local residents would accept a single building but not multiple HMOs. Alf felt that the two new access points proposed on an S-bend presented traffic hazards and

traffic risks onto Strand Way, and was out of keeping as no other house on the road had a driveway opposite another driveway across the road. Alf stated that the S-bend on the road was a blind spot after Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) granted planning permission for number 20 to move the fence to the pavement line, which residents objected to, and residents had also suggested that car parking was provided at the rear of the proposed development and an internal roadway be created from the existing Liberty of Earley House access point on Strand Way. Alf was of the opinion that the proposal would introduce unwanted traffic and safety issues on this S-bend. Alf stated that some residents of Liberty of Earley House parked on Strand Way as some of the occupants owned two vehicles, and there was no guarantee that the proposals would not lead to additional on road parking in front of existing driveways. Alf stated that no considerations had been given to net zero, COP 26, or WBC's 'let's talk climate' project, whilst no electric vehicle charging points were proposed and the roof design would not allow for photovoltaic panel installation. Alf stated that additional light pollution as a result of the proposals would directly impact one resident who was a member of the British Astronomical Association who had telescopes in his garden, had written academic papers, and undertook professional research for the association in the southern sky which would affect organisations such as NASA, and could halt his research which Alf felt was unreasonable. Alf stated that an elderly resident of number 20 would be negatively affected by the shutting of car doors and the security lights of the car park switching on and off, and suggested that the car park be relocated to the rear of the development with an internal road created. Alf added that the development would look directly into number 20's ground floor bedroom, garden and bathroom, and asked that high hedgerow be planted along Strand Way and that no new access points be constructed on Strand Way. Alf stated that none of the objections raised by residents had been considered, and residents had felt disregarded.

John Cornwell, agent, spoke on support of the application. John stated that he was stunned by some of the public speaking comments, and dismissed that this was an application for HMOs as it was instead a proposal for small affordable flats which was in line with WBC's housing strategy, as this was the type of accommodation required in the area. John was of the opinion that the fact that an astronomer lived next door should not warrant a reason for refusal. John stated that the charity had operated for over 300 years, and had the sole remit of providing housing for those in need. John stated that officers had given unequivocal advice which had been strictly followed by the applicant. John concluded by stating that the proposals met all local and national planning policies, and urged the Committee to approve the application.

David Hare, Ward Member, spoke in objection to the application. David stated that the trustees of Liberty House had not appeared to have given due consideration to local residents, which was regrettable. David added that the access points contained within the proposal would cause issues for entry and exit of vehicles to the site, which would be exacerbated should residents park on Strand Way. David stated that the eastern flats would not have car parking incorporated next to their building, whilst no electric vehicle charging points nor heat pumps would be provided. David was of the opinion that the proposals were not in keeping with Liberty of Earley House or with other properties on Strand Way, and he felt that one purpose built building would be more efficient. David commented that it would be a great shame should the work of the resident involved in astronomical studies be required to stop as a result of this development.

Chris Bowring sought clarification on a number of points raised by public speakers. Chris queried whether the properties would be classed as HMOs, sought more details with

regards to the sustainability points raised, and sought additional clarification with regards to the proposed car parking arrangements. Simon Taylor, case officer, confirmed that the proposals would not be classed as HMOs. With regards to sustainability measures, Simon stated that the current version of the Local Plan was behind the current standards, however there was a condition requiring ten percent reduction in energy use. Simon added that the highways officer had not insisted on electric vehicle charging points as this was an affordable scheme. In relation to car parking, Simon stated that he had visited the site and had not noticed additional on-street car parking, however he noted that on-street car parking could occur at other times of the day. Simon added that this development would effectively double the provision of car parking per unit when compared with the recent approval at Liberty of Earley House.

Andrew Mickleburgh sought assurances that the measures within the condition relating to drainage were sufficient to deal with any issues as the WBC drainage officer had objected due to a lack of detail. Simon Taylor stated that the NPPF required a sequential approach in terms of drainage, and the site was greenfield. Simon added that officers were confident that the condition would deal with issues related to flood risk. Simon added that the comment made by Thames Water was fairly standard, and officers felt that the sequential approach would address issues, whilst waste water was a matter for Thames Water to address.

Andrew Mickleburgh commented that it was rare to secure significant numbers of affordable housing in one location, and queried whether any future changes to the affordable rent status of the units would be required to return to the Planning Committee for approval. Simon Taylor stated that the application was subject to legal agreement which conditioned 6 units to be affordable housing and delivery outside of this would require a new legal agreement. The applicant operated as a charitable alms house, and should they not deliver the scheme in line with their operational model then they could encounter issues with regards to their charitable status. Lyndsay Jennings, Senior Solicitor, stated that the S106 agreement required 6 units to be delivered as affordable housing, with any amendments to this agreement required via the usual deed of variation route. Lyndsay confirmed that the S106 agreement did not secure 100 percent of the units as affordable housing.

Andrew Mickleburgh queried why electric vehicle charging points were not being installed on this site. Simon Taylor stated that the electric vehicle comments followed on from the 2019 application for the adjacent site. Simon added that there was no local policy requirement to provide electric vehicle charging points for this application. Connor Corrigan, Service Manager – Planning and Delivery, commented that there would be a building regulations requirement to install electric vehicle charging points at developments going forwards.

Andrew Mickleburgh proposed an additional informative reminding the applicant that they would be required to meet all building control regulations including those related to electric vehicle charging points in future. This proposal was seconded, carried, and added to the list of informatives.

Carl Doran commented that the applicant required heavily on the premise of 100 percent of the units to be delivered as affordable housing, as the housing mix was a departure from policy. Carl queried why it was acceptable to allow this proposal on the basis of only 35 percent of units being delivered as affordable housing. Simon Taylor stated that the affordable housing documentation referred to delivery of 100 percent of the units as

affordable housing which was slightly misleading. Notwithstanding, the proposals were policy compliant and the applicant operated the existing units next door as affordable housing. Simon stated that the alternative of requiring 100 percent affordable housing could result in the bank not providing the financing to the applicant for the scheme, which would result in no units being delivered and consequently no affordable housing being delivered. Simon stated that delivery of one and two bedroom units were consistent with Liberty of Earley House next door.

Carl Doran queried how the requirement for this space to be retained as open space had been removed. Simon Taylor stated that his understanding was that the land was not required as a public open space, and the application was in part a change of use from open space to residential accommodation. Simon added that the space was currently fenced off, and as such there would be no loss of open space to the public.

David Hare commented that from his discussions with the applicant, some units may be required to be charged at market rate, or the eastern unit may have to be sold to a housing association in order to pay for the overall scheme.

Stephen Conway sought additional details regarding the comments raised by the crime prevention officer, and queried whether headlight spill would have negative effects on dwellings on the opposite side of the road. Simon Taylor stated that the crime prevention officer had been fairly thorough in their assessment of this application, and they generally find objection to some aspects of many applications. The main issue raised was in relation to the lack of habitable windows to the side of the development, however this had not been considered as a major issue due to the length of the access point to the building. In relation to the impact of headlights on residents within opposite dwellings, the property in question had fencing along the roadside which would minimise the impacts of the headlights.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey commented that she liked the idea of electric charging infrastructure being installed to allow for easy future operational installation. Rachelle added that she would prefer to see 100 percent affordable housing provided, however she understood the issue in doing so.

Sam Akhtar commented that he would like to see installation of electric vehicle infrastructure, and queried whether the cycle storage could be moved any closer to the units. Simon Taylor stated that a better location for the cycle storage would be agreed in conjunction with condition 9.

Angus Ross queried whether any consideration had been given to off-site biodiversity contributions to make a more substantial impact. Simon Taylor commented that officers felt that condition 6 was as far as what could be sought.

Pauline Jorgensen commented that the fence along Cutbush Lane had never allowed access to the site. Pauline queried whether retrospective CIL would be required should units not be classified as affordable units in future. Simon Taylor stated that should all units be 100 percent affordable housing, they would not be CIL liable, and an exemption would apply should the units be operated by a charity for charitable purposes. Simon stated that the legal agreement could be modified to make any market rate units retrospectively CIL liable in future, in a similar way to a self-build exemption where the owner would be required to live in the property for three years to claim the exemption.

A number of Members raised concerns related to access being granted off of Cutbush Lane to the application site on an unrestricted basis, in part due to the vulnerability of some of the residents who may reside within the proposed dwellings. Members agreed that the option for residents of the dwellings to use the access point as a more pleasant route to walk and cycle sustainably to and from their homes was beneficial, however this access should only be available to residents of the units via a number lock mechanism. Connor Corrigan stated that the ability to restrict access from Cutbush Lane to residents of the units could be incorporated into condition 14.

Stephen Conway proposed an informative, urging the applicant to restrict access from Cutbush Lane to the residents of the dwellings. This was seconded by Pauline Jorgensen, carried, and added to the list of informatives.

Chris Easton provided some additional detail with regards to comments made by Alf Wojtasz regarding access. Chris stated that Strand Way had been in place for some time with an S-bend, and no accidents had been reported on the road within the last five years. Chris added that access was being sought for a low level car park, and access would require highways safety audits throughout development.

Carl Doran sought additional details with regards to issues relating to headlight glare. Chris Easton stated that any vehicle travelling eastbound along Strand Way would pose much greater head on light spill to number 20 from the carriageway than from vehicles entering and exiting the proposed car park.

Bill Soane queried whether there was any opportunity to link the two proposed car parks. Chris Easton stated that this would reduce the total amount of car park spaces provided on the site. Chris added that the current proposals would allow for some over provision of car parking, which opened up the opportunity for the neighbouring property, Liberty of Earley House, which was also owned by the applicant to allow some of their residents to park within the unallocated car parking spaces to reduce any instances of on-street parking. Chris added that the proposals were not dissimilar to other similar developments.

RESOLVED That application number 213457 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 94 to 103, amendment to part A of the recommendation as set out in the Supplementary Planning Agenda, additional informative reminding the applicant that they would be required to meet all building control regulations including those related to electric vehicle charging points in future as resolved by the Committee, and additional informative urging the applicant to restrict access from Cutbush Lane to the residents of the dwellings as resolved by the Committee.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.45 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Jackie Rance (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Jenny Cheng, Carl Doran, Michael Firmager, Adrian Mather, Tahir Maher and Barrie Patman

Others Present

Jim Stockley, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Mark Redfearn, Head of Localities

45. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

46. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

48. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

49. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

50. PUBLIC TOILET PROVISION

Members received an update on public toilet provision within the Borough from Mark Redfearn, Head of Localities. Members also considered information provided by Crohn's and Colitis UK.

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

- The local authority did not have any statutory responsibilities in terms of providing public toilets.
- In 2009 the Council had moved away from the traditional model to the Local Loos Scheme. Under this scheme participating local businesses allowed the public access to their toilet facilities and displayed a small sticker or sign to advertise this fact. There were currently 10 Local Loos across the Borough.
- The primary reason for moving to the Local Loos Scheme was to improve the choice and quality of toilet facilities available. The public toilet facilities at the time had often been subject to vandalism and cost a lot to maintain to an acceptable standard.
- Members noted the desktop audit of what toilet facilities were available across the Borough. There were approximately 170 toilets in locations such as petrol stations, garden centres, council buildings and the retail sector.
- The Council had only received one specific enquiry in the past year about the availability of public toilets within the Borough.

- There were not currently that many Changing Places facilities available across the Borough. This would be taken into account in the development of new community facilities where possible, to increase the number available. The Head of Localities indicated that new community centre that would be provided as part of the Matthew's Green development would have a Changing Places facility.
- It was confirmed that the public toilet located in Peach Place was provided by Wokingham Town Council. Members felt that signage to this facility could be improved.
- Members questioned whether signage and publicity around facilities was sufficient and what a review of these would entail. The Head of Localities commented that there was a need to understand that when people entered the different urban areas, was there sufficient signage to direct them to facilities that they could make use of. He indicated that there were several existing Town Centre Management Initiatives which could consider this. Communication and signposting were important.
- Members referred to the information provided by Crohn's and Colitis UK, which recommended that local authorities take the lead role in collating and publishing information.
- Crohn's and Colitis UK recommended that 'Not Every Disability is Visible' accessible toilet signs should be a requirement in all venues. A Member suggested that these should be included in facilities that the Council made available, including Council buildings. This was echoed in the information provided by a local Crohn's sufferer. The Head of Localities indicated that this could be addressed with the Facilities team with regards to Council buildings.
- A Member commented that he had a number of petrol stations in his ward. He questioned whether the Council could work with these businesses to better advertise available toilet facilities. The Head of Localities suggested that this could be taken forward via links with the businesses through the Economic Development Team.
- In response to a Member question, the Head of Localities indicated that there was not a limit to the number of businesses that could sign up to the Local Loo Scheme, although an increase in budget would be required should there be a big increase in take up. Most businesses were paid £600 a year to make sure facilities were sufficient, and one was paid £1000. The Head of Localities agreed to inform Members outside of the meeting which business received £1000.
- A Member referred to confusing signage in Woodley which pointed away from the toilets provided by the Town Council. He suggested increased working with the Town Centre Management Initiative and the Town and Parish Councils.
- A Member highlighted the toilet facilities in the Elms Road car park in Wokingham, which she felt could be better advertised. She went on to question whether Wokingham station had been approached with regards to making their facilities part of the Local Loo scheme.
- Members noted that the report recommended that given the length of time since the decision to establish the Local Loo Scheme had been taken, that an Equality Impact Assessment be conducted for the scheme to ensure that it was supporting the Protected Characteristics detailed in the Equality Act 2010. Members asked who would be consulted and suggested groups including women, elderly, parents of small children, Support U and those with disabilities. The Head of Localities indicated that the Council had a new Equalities Strategy and part of this focused on engaging with residents from the perspective of their particular protected characteristics. A residents' Equalities Forum was being established, initially made up of 16 organisations. One of the things that the group may do was help the

Council in completing Equality Impact Assessments. He also referred to the Engage Wokingham communication platform.

- A Member questioned whether other new largescale developments would have a Changing Places facility. The Head of Localities indicated that it may not be possible in all.
- It was suggested that the location of toilet facilities be better advertised. An article in the Borough News, and use of the local media and Council website, was suggested.
- A Member questioned whether the quality of toilets made available under the Local Loos Scheme, was monitored, and was informed that the Localities Officers periodically undertook inspections to ensure that they were clean and able to be accessed.
- The Head of Localities indicated that he was not aware of people experiencing resistance to using Local Loo Scheme facilities if they were not paying customers. Any feedback was welcomed.
- It was noted that the Waterside Centre toilets had experienced issues with blocking for some time, and that it was largely the result of large numbers of people using it following the regular Park Run and the facilities being insufficient for such high scale usage.
- Members agreed to recommend that the Council lead the undertaking of a review of signage and publicity of the Local Loo Scheme and other toilets available within Wokingham Borough, facilitating information from businesses and the Town and Parish Councils. The Head of Localities indicated that this was likely to be undertaken in stages and would need to involve the Communication, Engagement and Marketing Team and the Facilities Team.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That it be recommended that the Council lead the undertaking of a review of signage and publicity of the Local Loo Scheme and other toilets available within Wokingham Borough, facilitating information from businesses and the Town and Parish Councils.
- 2) That Mark Redfearn be thanked for his presentation and Crohn's and Colitis UK be thanked for the information provided.

51. UPDATE ON HEALTHWATCH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH

Jim Stockley provided an update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough.

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

- A common theme of communication with Healthwatch was people asking where they could find information about a particular service.
- Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust had asked the Healthwatches in Berkshire West to undertake a survey on the Ageing Well service. The report would be provided to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the future.
- GP access and access to NHS dentists continued to be an issue locally.
- Jim Stockley indicated that he was the Chair of More Arts. Work was being undertaken around developing the benefits of arts and culture to health and wellbeing in the local community.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough be noted.
- 2) That Jim Stockley be thanked for his presentation.

52. 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:

- Members were reminded of the extraordinary meeting scheduled for 21 February.
- It was suggested that the update on Health Integration be moved to the February meeting from the March meeting.
- It was proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Action Plan be moved to the June meeting.

RESOVLED: That the forward programme be noted.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDARDS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.37 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser (Chairman), Prue Bray, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Abdul Loyes, Daniel Sargeant (Vice-Chairman), Caroline Smith and Jackie Rance

Parish/Town Council Representatives Present

Sally Gurney (Co-Optee, Wokingham Town Council), Roy Mantel (Co-Optee Twyford Parish Council) and Sheena Matthews (Co-Optee, Earley Town Council)

Officers Present

Jennifer Lee, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer
Callum Wernham, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist

17. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Sheena Matthews, Co-Optee from Earley Town Council, to the Committee following her appointment at full Council on 20 January 2022. Sheena stated that she was a Member of Earley Town Council and had been for a number of years, and added that she had a background in international development and the Civil Service, with a particular interest in good governance and standards, and looked forward to providing input into the Standards Committee.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

21. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

22. PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL QUESTION TIME

There were no Parish or Town Council questions.

23. UPDATE ON COMPLAINTS

The Committee considered a report, set out in agenda pages 9 to 14, which provided an update on progress relating to Councillor Code of Conduct complaints.

The report stated that since the previous meeting of the Committee, on 11 October 2021, two new complaints had been received and a number of other complaints had been progressed.

Andrew Moulton, Monitoring Officer, provided a progress report on each of the complaints (set out in Appendix A to the report). Andrew stated that a further complaint had been received in the past week, over and above those mentioned in Appendix A.

Andrew reaffirmed the Committee's expectations in relation to clearer and more expedient timescales when dealing with complaints, including acknowledging complaints within three days, holding an initial meeting within fifteen days, and concluding an investigation within three months where a hearing was required.

In relation to the three outstanding historical complaints, Andrew stated that two were in relation to the same Councillor and the cases were progressing with a view to resolve by the next meeting of the Committee on 2 March 2022.

Andrew sought the Committee's views on improving the overall understanding of the relevant Code of Conduct for all Members, including any additional training opportunities.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points and queries were raised:

- What progress had been made in relation to the complaint lodged in September 2021? Monitoring Officer response – Active communications had now been established with the Councillor concerned, and a resolution was very much the focus within the next few weeks. The previous engagement of this particular Councillor had not been up to the level expected of a Councillor alleged to have breached the Code of Conduct, and any influence that the Committee could bring in terms of encouraging all Councillors to engage with the process in future would be welcomed.
- It was noted that the Monitoring Officer had met with Town and Parish Council clerks to discuss the adoption of the Local Government Association's (LGA's) model Code of Conduct, and a further meeting could be set up to reinforce this and to explore options to make Councillors more aware of the expectations of the Code of Conduct and engagement with the complaints process when required.
- Was it unusual for Councillors to persistently or repeatedly breach the Code of Conduct? Monitoring Officer response – No, this was quite exceptional and the particular case was being viewed as a one-off.
- The Monitoring Officer agreed to schedule an item on how to make the training process (including social media and press related training) more meaningful for the meeting of the Committee on 2 March 2022, and welcomed the Committee's thoughts on any possible improvements.
- The Monitoring Officer agreed to schedule an item updating on the position of each Town and Parish Council in relation to adoption of the new LGA model Code of Conduct, including exploring the option of requiring all Members to re-sign the new Code of Conduct, for the meeting of the Committee on 2 March 2022.
- Members discussed the sanctions available to the Committee when a Member was found to be in serious breach of the Code of Conduct. In addition to naming the Member and detailing the breach of the Code of Conduct, which some Councillors could view as a positive as they felt that they had stood up for residents, the most stringent sanction available was to ban a Councillor from a particular Committee for a period of time. It was noted that prior to 2010, the Standards Board had the ability to ban a Councillor

from sitting on the Council for up to six months. Very serious breaches of the Code of Conduct could be a police matter.

- It was noted that the complaint lodged against the Wokingham Town Council Member should have been dealt with more quickly, and a resolution would be achieved by the date of the next Committee meeting.
- It was noted that more examples of breaches, in an anonymised and redacted format, would be useful for the Committee to understand common themes and potential grey areas. It was added that examples from other Local Authorities could be used, and miniature case studies could also be presented.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the update on Councillor Code of Conduct complaints be noted;
- 2) the Monitoring Officer meet with Town and Parish Council clerks to explore options to make Councillor's more aware of the expectations of the Code of Conduct and engagement with the complaints process when required;
- 3) the Monitoring Officer schedule an item for the meeting of the Committee on 2 March 2022 on how to make the training process including social media and press related training more meaningful;
- 4) the Monitoring Officer schedule an item for the meeting of the Committee on 2 March 2022, updating on the position of each Town and Parish Council in relation to adoption of the new LGA model Code of Conduct, including exploring the option of requiring all Members to re-sign the new Code of Conduct;
- 5) opportunities to present redacted and anonymised examples of breaches of the Code of Conduct to the Committee be explored.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LICENSING AND APPEALS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.22 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Rachel Burgess, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Barrie Patman (Chairman), Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Rachele Shepherd-DuBey, Bill Soane and Sean Murphy

Officers Present

Neil Allen, Senior Specialist, Legal
Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Stephen Brown, Interim Assistant Director Place and Growth
Moira Fraser, Policy and Governance Officer
Sean Murphy, Public Protection Partnership Manager
Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer, Compliance and Enforcement
Sean O'Connor, Lead Specialist, Legal
Ed Shaylor, Head of Enforcement and Safety

17. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes and Shahid Younis.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below, and signed by the Chairman.

The following sentence be added to item 16 of the minutes (page 9 on the agenda):

Councillor Fishwick stated that journeys need to be seamless and not end at the boundary, therefore officers at a senior level and the relevant Executive Members should work to promote the use of Reading's bus lanes by Wokingham drivers (this was in relation to resolution number 3).

Matters arising

Councillor Shenton pointed out that Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer Compliance and Enforcement, had stated in the previous meeting that the Taxi and Private Hire Policies would be brought to the January meeting for consideration. However, there was no report in the agenda with these policies.

Councillor Burgess agreed with the point raised by Councillor Shenton, questioned the items in the forward programme and also asked if the Taxis Liaison Group would be involved in the consultation.

Julia O'Brien explained that the draft policy was not ready to be submitted to the Committee yet. She informed that work was being undertaken to draft the policy and confirmed that the trade would be involved in the consultation. Therefore, the forward programme would have to be amended.

Councillor Fishwick asked for an update on the issue of Reading bus lanes. Stephen Brown, Assistant Director for Place and Growth informed that a letter had been sent to

Reading, however no response had yet been received, he would inform the Committee as and when he received a reply.

In relation to the issue previously raised by Councillor Kerr, that the Licensing and Appeals Committee had recommended a freeze and subsidy to the taxi fees and a refund those who had already paid, Councillor Fishwick stated that Jennifer Lee, Legal Specialist had confirmed that this Committee did not have the authority to make a decision on fees, however it could make recommendations. He asked which body could actually approve it and if this had been actioned. He stated that this subsidy equated to £9k, and therefore he believed that it could be delegated to officer level.

Stephen Brown stated that in previous years had officers taken such delegated decisions. However, this year the Council was looking to save £2m and officers were not prepared to take such decisions in the current context. He pointed out that there would be an opportunity for full Council to consider this proposal at its Budget meeting in February.

Sean O'Connor, Lead Specialist Legal stated that there was a difficulty in relation to mid-year changes to budget decisions and the funding of such decisions. He confirmed that next year's budget would be discussed at the Budget Council meeting in February.

Councillor Fishwick asked who would be able to make a decision on the recommendation relation to this year's subsidy.

In relation to the concerns being raised, the Chairman stated that Members should have submitted Members' questions prior to the meeting, so that they could have been included in the agenda and a proper response could have been prepared.

Stephen Brown explained that this Committee had made a recommendation to change the budget mid-year, however there were no funds to support this recommendation mid-year. There was an opportunity to make this recommendation to the next year's budget.

Councillor Ferris expressed concern that the Committee had made a formal recommendation and no formal process had been followed to consider this recommendation, and no formal response had been given to the Committee. He wished it to be recorded that there was strong objection to the way this matter had been dealt with.

19. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

21. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

22. FEES AND CHARGES FOR LICENSABLE ACTIVITIES 2022/2023

The Committee considered the Fees and Charges for Licensable Activities 2022/23 report which was set out in agenda pages 11-31.

Ed Shaylor, Head of Enforcement and Safety presented the report. This was an annual report which formed part of the overall Council's budget setting process, and the

recommendations from this Committee would be submitted to the Budget Council in February.

Ed Shaylor stated that the proposal was to set remain unchanged fees for 2022/23. The rationale was that the service was returning in-house in April, and a review of the costs would have to be carried out before any changes could be made (fees were set on a cost recovery basis).

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

- Councillor Ferris asked if it was possible to change the figures in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licences to the reduced figures agreed by this Committee in June 2021;
- Sean O'Connor stated that this Committee could recommend a change in the figures, however he pointed out that if the reduced figures did not cover the costs, this would mean a subsidy from the general funds. Council would make a final decision on the figures;
- Councillor Ferris stated that the figures were based on £59 per hour under the PPP. It was necessary to work out what the new hourly rate would be once the service returned in-house;
- Ed Shaylor agreed that the fees were based on hourly rates and that it remained to be seen what efficiencies could be found after April, however the hourly cost would continue to be the same;
- Councillor Ferris felt uncomfortable with making a proposal to the Council on next year's budget without knowing how much the service would cost under the new structure from April;
- Councillor Soane stated that it was impossible for the Council to know at the moment how much the service would cost under the new structure;
- Councillor Burgess seconded the proposal to put forward the reduced figures in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licences, as previously agreed by the Committee. She expressed concern that the recommendations of the Committee were not being taken seriously. She believed that £9k was not a material sum for the Council.

Upon being put to the vote, most Members were in favour of Councillor Ferris' proposal.

Councillor Dennis asked for clarification on what would happen to the recommendation for the mid-year reduction. Stephen Brown stated that the relevant director had indicated that there was insufficient funds to support that recommendation.

Councillor Ferris stated that, in view of the vote in favour of the proposal, he expected the figures in pages 25-27 be amended as per previous discussions in June (lower figures).

In response to a question Sean O'Connor pointed out that the funds for this proposal were yet to be identified.

Upon being put to the vote most Members were in favour of the recommendations contained in the report with the addition of a subsidy to the taxi fees, as per discussions during the meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The fees set out at Appendix A and B go forward for consideration as part of the Council's fee and budget setting process;
- 2) The fees for hackney carriage and private hire will be set at the levels which were agreed at the Licensing and Appeals Committee meeting on 23 June 2021;
- 3) Those fees which are within the Council's discretion to set remain unchanged for 2022/23; and
- 4) The fees for taxi and private hire vehicles and private hire operators for the financial year 2023/24 are reviewed during 2022/23 with a view to carrying out statutory consultation regarding any proposed increase to the fees prior to process for budget setting for 2023/24.

Subsequently it was clarified that the fees in relation to the reduction for taxi fees (resolution 2), were as follows:

- Hackney carriage vehicles - £248
- Private hire vehicles - £248
- Private hire vehicles with dispensation - £228

23. STATUTORY CONSULTATION ON INCREASE TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFFS

The Committee received the Statutory Consultation on Increase to Hackney Carriage Fare Tariffs report which was set out in agenda pages 33-41.

Moira Fraser, Policy and Governance Officer presented the report. Officers had received a request by the taxi trade to increase its tariffs, this request was supported by a petition from 31 members of the trade, as set out in the table contained in the report.

The petition pointed out that the last tariff rate rise was in 2010 and there had been a minor variation in 2014. The changes proposed were as stated in the report and Members were asked to consider the proposal. Members were reminded that the Committee could set a maximum tariff, there was opportunity for drivers to set lower tariffs if they wanted to.

Any changes would be subject to statutory consultation. Moira Fraser explained that the proposed short period of consultation was to meet timescales for the March meeting of the Committee. If objections were received the Committee would have consider them, and if not, the changes would be implemented.

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

- Councillor Fishwick expressed concern that the proposed consultation period was only two weeks and proposed to extend it to 21 days;
- The Chairman explained that this issue had been considered, however there was an issue with extending the consultation period, in that it would mean that this Committee would not be able to consider it before the end of this municipal year;
- Moira Fraser confirmed that there was an issue in extending the consultation period and not being able to submit a report in time for the agenda publication for the meeting on 2 March. There was also an issue with not being able to issue a notice for the newspaper any earlier;

- Councillor Fishwick was concerned that 14 days was a short period for this consultation. Moira Fraser stated that as well as the newspaper, the consultation was also advertised on the website and the trade was directly informed about it;
- In response to a question Moira Fraser confirmed that the figures contained in the report had been proposed by the trade (not officers). She added that the Committee could decide to propose different figures for consultation;
- Councillor Burgess was in favour of the proposal, in view of the fact that there had not been a review since 2010 and it only brought tariffs in line with inflation;
- Councillor Burgess asked how this proposed structure compared with other local authorities;
- Moira Fraser stated that comparisons were made on a two-mile journey and the tariffs were as follows:
 - Reading - £8
 - West Berkshire - £7.40
 - Bracknell - £6.50
 - Wokingham's proposal was for £8.10
- Councillor Fishwick emphasised that it was important to facilitate communication about the consultation, and he believed three weeks was necessary to enable people to take part;
- Councillor Firmager asked if extending the consultation would mean entering the purdah period;
- Sean O'Connor explained that although an effort was made to avoid consultations from taking place during purdah, there was nothing to prevent consultations from taking place during this sensitive period before elections. Luciane Bowker, Senior Democratic Services Specialist stated that it was the decision and not the consultation that would fall into the purdah period, Sean O'Connor explained that decisions could be taken during purdah;
- The Chairman was of the opinion that extending the consultation period would not make much difference in terms of public participation;
- Moira Fraser pointed out that the law stated that the new fees needed to come into effect within two months of the consultation closing. If the consultation period was extended to 21 March, the new fees would have to come into effect by 21 May, and there was no other scheduled meeting before May;
- Councillor Fishwick proposed postponing the 2 March meeting by one week;
- Julia O'Brien stated that in her experience, no matter the length of the consultation period, very few responses were received in response to the advertisements;
- The Chairman expressed concern that the proposal put Wokingham's tariffs above the tariffs charged by neighbouring authorities;
- Councillor Ferris stated that this depended upon when the other authorities had carried out their reviews;
- Moira Fraser stated that West Berkshire had undertaken a consultation in November last year and Bracknell had undertaken a consultation in August last year.

After much consideration and a five minute adjournment, Members agreed to go to consultation on the proposal put forward by the trade. Members asked that the period of consultation be extended by one week if it was possible to move the date of the next Licensing and Appeals Committee to 10 March, and to revert to two weeks if not. *Subsequently it was ascertained that it was not possible to move the date to 10 March.*

In response to a question it was ascertained that the consultation would be carried out on the proposal as presented by the trade, including the changes in relation to timings of tariffs.

Councillor Soane raised concern over the proposal to operate different tariffs for special event days such as the Henley Regatta (page 36 paragraph 1.8).

Councillor Ferris stated that there was a historical issue during the Henley Regatta, with unfair competition from taxi drivers from other areas.

Upon being put to the vote most Members were in favour of the recommendation to go out to consultation on the trade's proposals.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) A statutory consultation be carried out on the proposed business case put forward by the trade, as stated in the report; and
- 2) The consultation period be extended to three weeks, provided that the date for the next Committee is moved to 10 March, and that it reverts back to two weeks if this date can not be changed.

Subsequently, Neil Allen drew attention to the fact that the recommendation approved included in its proposal point 1.8, which mentioned tariffs for special events such as the Henley Regatta. He pointed out that if no comments were received the proposal would be implemented as stated in the report, including point 1.8.

Members discussed the possibility of taking out the reference to the Henley Regatta from the consultation, but did not come to a consensus.

Councillor Dennis referred to page 39 of the agenda and stated that the trade was asking that WBC Council liaised with Henley Council about the different tariffs which were charged during the Henley Regatta.

Moira Fraser informed that South Oxfordshire, which is where the Henley drivers operated from, did not currently set maximum tariffs for their drivers.

Ed Shaylor explained that officers had taken the view that the trade had not put forward a business case to put up their tariffs during the Henley Regatta, they had simply pointed out that other drivers charged higher rates.

Councillor Firmager pointed out that it would be impossible to ascertain which journeys were to and from the Henley Regatta specifically.

In response to a question Neil Allen clarified that the mention of Henley in point 1.8 was aspirational only, and therefore he recommended it be included, as per the agreed recommendation, in the consultation. Members were in agreement with this advice.

24. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Forward Programme which was set out in Agenda pages 43-44.

Councillor Burgess pointed out that item 3 on the Forward Programme for 2 March would be a review of the draft policy and the outcome of the consultation would be considered at the June meeting.

Councillor Burgess requested that a meeting of the Taxis Liaison Group be scheduled during the consultation period to discuss the policy.

Councillor Ferris stated that the remit of the Licensing and Appeals Committee was being widened and asked for an update on this. Councillor Soane suggested that the implication of moving public protection and licencing in-house from April be discussed at the next meeting in March.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The following items be added to the March meeting:
 - I. the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Policy
 - II. the implication of moving public protection and licensing in-house
- 2) A meeting of the Taxis Liaison Group be scheduled during the consultation period of the draft policy; and
- 3) The consultation review on the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle Policy be added to the June meeting

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors In Attendance

Stephen Conway
Gary Cowan
Maria Gee
Clive Jones

83. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Graham Howe.

84. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Meeting held on 25 November 2021 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 15 December 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Leader of Council.

85. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillors John Halsall and John Kaiser declared personal and prejudicial interests in Agenda Item 89 Optalis Contract Renewal 2022 as they were Non-Executive Directors of Optalis Holdings Ltd. Councillors Halsall and Kaiser left the Chamber during discussion of the item and did not take part in the vote.

Councillor Charles Margetts declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 89 Optalis Contract Renewal 2022 as he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd. Councillor Margetts left the Chamber during discussion of the item and did not take part in the vote.

86. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

I want to make it clear that all this administration, my party and I are completely opposed to the loss of every blade of grass, tree, shrub, field or greenspace in the Borough. Once it's gone it's gone forever. The verdict of the Borough's "enough is enough" consultation was also clear that the residents of the Borough agree with our stance. I have lived in the Borough for the best part of sixty years. I remember how the rural district of Wokingham was.

Nevertheless, we are not an independent island. We must follow Government mandates, which require us to make provision for a Government determined number of houses. All mainstream political parties have within their manifestos a commitment to build a huge number of houses; the current Government objectives are amongst the lowest of the three national parties.

We have the option to do nothing, which would mean that we have no plan and therefore no defence against speculative development. There is not a square inch of the Borough

which has not been optioned by a developer who would seek to exercise that option by claiming that we have no plan or five-year land supply. The developer would be successful in his application. I have no doubt that we would be faced with housing numbers several times those currently mandated. This is the option that Lib Dem South Oxfordshire took with the result, I understand, of many, many more houses and the original plan reimposed.

The current consultation for the Local Plan Update has now closed. There are at least two more opportunities for residents to make their views known. I have been very pleased to see a very good level of response. I was delighted to see many of my colleagues making strong representations for their wards. It was disappointing that other Councillors confined themselves to making futile political points about the housing numbers. As I have said all mainstream political parties within their manifestos have a commitment to build a huge number of houses, of which the current Government's objectives are amongst the lowest.

I have worked hard and successfully to ensure that our housing numbers were reduced from 1,635 to the current 789 and campaigned successfully, initially alone with the support of John Redwood and Theresa May, to oppose the planned changes to national planning policies. Notwithstanding the consultation, I will continue to press Government to make more changes and encourage our MPs, who are all critical of the housing numbers and planning policies, to join me in so doing. As the Council and Government are of the same party, there is leverage that can be applied. I have written to the Minister and have received an acknowledgement. I am awaiting a meeting date. I have been successful in the past and hope to be so in the future.

Last time we as an Executive met, the new Omicron variant was just known in Wokingham. It has then since dominated our thoughts. The rate of new Covid cases reached a high of just over 1,600 per 100,000 at the beginning of January. Covid led to many families having to change their plans over the festive period. The new year started with a welcome decline in rates although with schools returning and the high transmissibility of the Omicron variant in an unvaccinated (in primary settings), and therefore susceptible population, this decline has been short lived. Rates are now back on the rise and are currently just over 1,350 per 100,000. The current rate reflects the week 13-19 January. We expect this to rise further, as daily case numbers continue to increase. Like the situation at the end of the Autumn term, most cases are now within our school age population and their parents.

The past month has seen, and continues to see, a flurry of new and changed guidance for us to follow. This is sometimes hard to keep pace with. Officers are working relentlessly to translate new guidance for our residents, through the Community Champion newsletter, via our website and other channels, and supporting our partners and providers working with care settings and educational settings as they navigate the complexities of the new situations.

There was an urgent national Omicron appeal for the public to 'Get Boosted Now', leading up to the end of 2021 and we have been working tirelessly to support health partners on the delivery of the new vaccination programme across the Borough. 67% of residents over the age of 12 have now received their booster vaccine and we continue to work with our healthcare colleagues to ensure that the vaccine offer reaches all our residents across the Borough.

With this backdrop of rising rates and pressure on services the Government's Plan B is being lifted from today. Whilst this removes the mandate to work from home and wear masks indoors, we continue to encourage residents to take precautions where there is the

risk of Covid transmission. We call upon all our residents and partners to be as patient as they can as services are operating under significant staffing pressure.

With one eye on the Spring, there will continue to be much change over the coming weeks whilst case rates remain high and rising; we must remain cautious and continue to employ all measures we can to keep our communities as safe as possible and reduce transmission as much as we can. And lastly on that topic, please continue to encourage everyone to be vaccinated with the three jabs.

On a happier note, for the last six months an organisation called Climate Emergency has been undertaking a benchmarking exercise of all Local Authority Climate Emergency Action Plans, scored against 200 criteria. The results were announced today, and I am very pleased to say that Wokingham ranked 8 out of 183 single tier authorities across the United Kingdom and I offer my congratulations to Gregor Murray, the Executive Member, who has pushed this forward.

We are approaching that time in the year when we present our medium-term budget proposals to full Council. We do this acutely aware of our objectives and responsibilities to the most vulnerable in our community. Last week we agreed to a Council Tax Reduction scheme approving over £4m worth of support to those facing financial hardship. This support sits amongst a whole range of measures we provide to those in need of financial assistance. John Kaiser will expand on this later in the meeting. We are also making great strides in the provision of affordable and social housing in the Borough, much needed particularly amongst our younger adults. The Gorse Ride project being considered at Executive next month is a testament to that.

Although we will continue to do what we can for our vulnerable, we must do this within our overall financial context of the Council. The Chief Finance Officer's statutory draft report sets this out clearly and alerts us to unprecedented times in terms of financial risk and uncertainty. We have the impact of rising inflation, particularly alarming in the procurement of gas and electricity with potential increases of over 80%. We have the ongoing implementation of the Adult Social Care reform for which we have calculated the full impact to be well over £20m to the Council. We have the uncertainty of the Local Government funding system to determine our future Government funding. This takes place under a national levelling up agenda, so it is unlikely to go well for Wokingham. In addition to which we have a host of other financial pressures yet to reveal themselves, such as the true cost of Covid-19 and the outcome of the consultation on the Minimum Revenue Provision, which could increase the cost of debt falling on our General Fund.

So, to quote Donald Rumsfeld '...as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know.' I would be inclined to go further than this and suggest our financial future also includes a degree of unknown unknowns, that is to say there are things we will not yet have been aware of.

It is in this context we must formulate our budget proposals and move forward with great caution through the following years. We passionately believe in helping those most in need in our community but can only do this by maintaining our strong financial resilience in the most precarious of circumstances. As my good friend and colleague, John Kaiser, often says "a council which is broke is no good to anyone".

87. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions submitted.

88. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

Approximately 8 months ago, supported by a big fanfare of publicity, Councillor Smith announced a Carbon capture plan, thanks to a £300,000 contribution from the Woodland Trust and an injection of £350,000 of Council capital borrowing.

The plan requires 250Ha of green space and Phase 1 was to set up a project team including a paid manager, develop a tree strategy, work with landowners, Parish and Town Councils.

Since the scheme's inception in which there seems to be no plan for replacement trees that die, no real update on progress in any of the plans initial intention yet at the same time the Council's own Planning Department continues to recommend the removal of TPO trees to facilitate development.

My question is simply how many of the 250,000 trees have been planted or agreements made to plant to date?

Answer

As you are aware, through updates provided at the Trees and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group of which you are a member, a project manager to lead the delivery of the 250,000 tree planting project and Tree Strategy, was recruited in September last year and in the four months since they arrived they have been working to deliver Phase 1 of the business plan. A project of this scale requires significant amount of preliminary feasibility and preparation work, involving stakeholder engagement, land negotiations, consultation, and design work, all before delivery can take place. In the last four months Officers have been focussed upon engaging with numerous landowners including schools, towns and parishes, and other third parties to begin negotiations for large scale planting schemes.

In the meantime, smaller scale planting has taken place already on sites in Woosehill Meadows, Shinfield St Mary's, Winnersh Community Orchard and Chiltern Drive. To date, 5,651 very precise number of trees have been planted and by March this year we are expecting to have planted a further 2,145 trees on a number of school sites in the Borough. That is a fantastic start in a very short space of time!

Now we are up and running, we will also be accepting applications for the Garden Forest Initiative as part of the tree planting project, whereby residents can apply to the Council for a tree to plant in their gardens. We have received over 631 applications in the first round of the initiative, and the trees will be provided, for residents to plant, in October this year.

Alongside the delivery of the 250,000 tree planting project, Officers will always be working to develop a new Tree Strategy for the Borough. The Tree Strategy will provide improved direction for the tree management and the Authority's approach across the Borough. It will

help the Borough to better understand the value of WBC's tree assets and provide guidance upon how planting schemes should be undertaken to optimise benefits for carbon sequestration, biodiversity and the local area.

An early engagement survey took place in November 2021, last year, to gather input from stakeholders and residents about some of the key areas that could be covered within the Strategy. This is to be used to assist with the preparation of the Strategy. Following further public consultation on the draft Strategy in 2022, this year the Executive will consider the adoption of the new Tree Strategy in early in 2023.

Supplementary Question

That would appear to be about 10% of the numbers so far identified. With respect to the planting of trees as there seems to be no real plans to build many houses in the north of the Borough, in particular Remenham and Hurst, would it not be just a good idea to sign all remaining trees there so two problems solved? You get trees planted and no houses either and I would call that a win, win.

Supplementary Answer

As you know Gary there are lots of things that you have to look at. That is why a scheme of this size is, as you quite rightly say, it is a massive scheme and yes we are only at the start. I would say, in answer to your question, it all depends on the ground conditions because not all ground conditions will accept trees so it would have to be looked at and considered. But, you also have to consider that the majority of that land would not be in the Council's ownership so it would be down to the landowner.

88.2 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

What will the effect on revenue costs be of cancelling the crematorium project over the next five years?

Answer

There was an indicative £110k net income in 2022/23 and £219k in 2023/24 and that was when the MTFP was agreed in February 2021. As this scheme has now been deleted, and has been ruled out at the viability stage, the income line has now been deleted along with £3.7m worth of expenditure from the 21/22 capital programme, which is £6m over two years. The impact has already been factored into our budget setting work in formulating a balanced budget for 2022/23 and, as you will already know, it has been presented to and considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

Part of this impact, obviously, will help to reduce the need to borrow more money.

Supplementary Question

When the idea of a crematorium was first raised, it was meant to address the need for our residents to have more local cremations and have them in a reasonable time without having the delays often associated with Reading and Easthampstead. Has this need from our residents gone away?

Supplementary Answer

Parts of the viability was to look at whether or not, it was not just about money, it was about whether or not the area could actually support another crematorium and when we

did the work and we looked at Bracknell, which owns the one as you say, and we looked at the Reading one an additional one would not help. It would not help with the numbers because the reason there has been delay at these crematoriums is because of Covid. It is not because they do not have capacity and once Covid, when it has gone away or once the Covid rules change significantly, they will be able to get back to business as usual and cope with the volume.

All we would do is put additional volume which would mean that we could not justify and the utilisation for the viability. I very much would like to have built it if it could be justified financially. But we cannot the money is just not there.

88.3 Maria Gee asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

The Capital Monitoring report shows reprofiling to date of £244m. What financial effect will this reprofiling have on the revenue costs required to manage these projects next year, in addition to those already planned for 2022/23?

Answer

Over the past two years, the Council has seen some unprecedented levels of uncertainty due to Covid-19. This has had an impact in some areas on the capital programme including the ability to source resources, materials and labour for some of the projects however we are still on track to invest £154m this year in the community as highlighted in the Capital Monitoring report. Alongside this, the Council have paused some programmes which will be considered in the future if viable business cases support these going ahead. You have just heard of one which is basically we are looking at solar farms for instance.

Any impact on revenue costs will be minimised and where required we will look to carry forward revenue budgets associated with these projects into future years. The Council continually monitors the impact of the Council's capital programme on borrowing costs and look to minimise these by borrowing when required as projects are delivered rather than ahead of need.

The reprofiling of the capital programme is therefore wholly financially responsible and will enable schemes to be more appropriately delivered and will reduce unnecessary costs in the short term by passporting decisions and implementation into future years. Both when service needs and the financial landscape will be more certain.

I would add that none of this reprofiling has been at the expense of delivering services.

Supplementary Question

So, the approved Capital Budget for the year 2021/22 is £204m. As I have mentioned the carry forward to futures years is £244m, which is 120% of the programme for this year. I appreciate that some of this year's projects have been delivered but that must mean that some projects are more than a year behind. Can you agree that it would be better to plan for a more deliverable programme so that residents might have certainty about investments in their communities?

For example, I see that the Montague Park community facility has been delayed yet again and I would regard that as an investment in services. So, I would really like to know when it is going to be delivered?

Supplementary Answer

I cannot tell you when that one will be delivered but if you want, I can write to you about that and explain why that has been delayed.

We live in very uncertain times, and you would not expect this Council to commit until we know where we are going and what is happening. Constantly in the past people have actually said that we have overborrowed, well we are now in a position whereby we feel we are not overborrowing, and we never will overborrow and we will make sure that our capital programme fits what is required at the time. We could not do it any other way. I mean it is just financially prudent to do it that way and of course there are some changes going on with regards to the way that councils can borrow money and the way they invest money and that is out for consultation at the moment, and we do not know the outcome of that yet.

88.4 Stephen Conway asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Question

My question relates to the Capital Budget Monitoring report. The first recommendation in that report states that there will be no financial impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2022/23. We live in inflationary times. Factors beyond the Council's control have led to significant inflation in costs since the budget was originally set. Given that progress on projects such as Twyford's new library has been delayed by these inflationary pressures, may I ask whether Recommendation 1 takes full account of inflation, current and projected?

Answer

Your question is very helpful because it indicates that there are uncertainties. Over the past two years, the Council has seen an unprecedented level of uncertainty due to Covid-19 and in response to this we have introduced a strengthening of our approach which includes the reprofiling of spend into future years.

Globally, inflation is an issue and will have an impact on the Council's capital programme. As presented to the Overview and Scrutiny as part of the budget submission for 22/23, we have looked to mitigate this through introducing £12m of central contingency for capital cost uplift pressures over the next three years.

Within the capital programme, projects also have allowances for a level of price inflation built into the budget, which was always the case.

The capital programme will continue to be monitored closely with continuing reporting to the Executive and recommendations to make modifications where needed. This is part of our ongoing strengthening in financial management arrangements required in such times of uncertainty and again I would just say that I would not hesitate if I feel that the finances of the Council are going off course. I will not hesitate to bring the numbers back and look at the numbers again because we have seen some massive increases, especially around labour and materials. We are not sure whether those increases are short term or whether they are long term, but we will be looking at it again, I expect, half way through the year.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for your answer John, that was helpful and more or less what I expected and hoped to hear.

I noticed in Appendix B of the Capital Budget Monitoring report the delivery of the new Twyford Library is now to be delayed until the financial year 2022/23 and this is not entirely a surprise to me. But the delay, I am sure you will be aware, will be very disappointing to many people in the northern parishes as they have been eagerly awaiting this long promised new library.

Can you give me a more precise indication of when in the financial year, 2022/23, structural work on the building will commence and when the project will finally be delivered?

Supplementary Answer

It is very difficult for me at this moment in time to give you a commitment to that and I would not want to tell you something that we could not meet.

We have lots of other things going on at the moment and I understand how important this is, and how it was promised in times pre-Covid. It was definitely on the agenda to deliver but we have challenges around buses, we have challenges around bulge classes at schools and all those things need additional funding. In your neck of the woods, as you probably know, you have schools, secondary schools, crying out for additional facilities. Now we have to balance all those things Stephen and so it is really difficult, and I could not answer the same question if I was posed it on any project that we have got going on at the moment to be honest with you.

89. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FY2021/22 - QUARTER THREE

The Executive considered a report setting out the expenditure, as at 31 December 2021, for the third quarter of the current financial year and the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, the Housing Revenue Account and the Schools' Block funding.

During his introduction of the report the Executive Member for Housing and Finance stated how proud he was that the Council had worked to minimise the impact of Covid on residents in the Borough. This had been achieved in many ways including the provision of affordable homes to those people in real need of housing. During Covid there had been an increase in the demand for affordable homes, which was due in the main to the high cost of rents in the Borough. The only solution was to deliver more social housing but unfortunately the rise in labour and material costs had made the delivery of social housing difficult and only possible on Council owned land, which included the regeneration of brownfield sites or assets in the Council's control.

Councillor Kaiser advised that he, working with Officers, would do everything he could to irradicate poverty and protect services in the Borough including expanding council tax discount where possible, assisting rough sleepers, and ensuring that the Council's housing stock continued to meet the Decent Homes Standard. He went on to add that in order to support families in crisis the Council was continually keeping under review the effectiveness of the local welfare provision scheme, ensuring ongoing consultation with residents and the voluntary sector to ascertain how those who needed crisis assistance could be fully supported and ensuring signposting and easy access to relevant schemes for those who needed to access them.

Councillor Kaiser highlighted that from a budget of around £150m a forecast overspend at year end was predicted in the sum of £523k, which given the difficulties of the last year and the fact that £388k of the overspend related to Covid expenditure he felt that this was a great achievement by the Officers.

Councillor Margetts highlighted the severe pressure that Officers in Adult Social Care had been under, not only dealing with the Covid response but also business as usual. He therefore wanted to thank those Officers for not only responding to the Covid emergency but also for nearly balancing the budget, despite the huge overspend advised during the first lockdown.

Councillor Murray also echoed the words previously stated as he felt to be overspent by only 0.35% under the conditions and pressures of the last year was a tremendous achievement.

The Leader also mentioned the remarkable job that the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive had done over the last two years.

With regards to recommendation 3) Councillor Halsall highlighted the work being undertaken as part of the Arts and Culture Strategy, including the establishment of the Cultural Alliance and the need to provide support to take the work set out in the Strategy forward.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) the financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis, as illustrated in the Executive Summary, be noted;
- 2) the overall forecast of the current position of the General Fund revenue budget, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) illustrated in the Executive Summary and appendices attached to the report be noted;
- 3) a supplementary estimate for £110,000 (c£55,000 per year) for additional capacity to support the Arts and Culture Strategy over the next two years be approved.

90. CAPITAL MONITORING 2021-22 - QUARTER 3

The Executive considered a report outlining the progress of the Council in delivering its capital programme for the financial year 2021/2022 and the Capital Monitoring report up to 31 December 2021.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing went through the report and advised the meeting that the capital programme was reviewed on a regular basis to ascertain if any savings could be made. Councillor Kaiser advised that it was possible that in future largescale funds would be required for schools to accommodate additional children within the Borough and therefore some of the non-essential projects may need to be rephased to a future date.

In addition, Councillor Kaiser was pleased to report that the predicted forecast at year end was around £8m under the amount forecast at the beginning of the year. It was noted that although less capital schemes were being delivered, due to material and labour shortages, borrowing was lower.

As advised in the response to Councillor Jones' question the crematorium scheme had been removed from the capital programme, due to the fact that there was capacity in the two neighbouring crematoriums and therefore the project did not now make commercial sense.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) the proposed rephrasing to the Capital Programme following the 'in-year' review, as set out in paragraph 3 of the report and Appendix B, be noted and approved. There is no financial / service impact from the reprofiling of budgets into 2022/2023;
- 2) the position of the capital programme at the end of Quarter 3 (to 31st December 2021), as summarised in the report and set out in detail in Appendix A, be noted;
- 3) the removal of the new Crematorium scheme from the capital programme be noted and approved. This will remove £3.7m of budget from the 2021/22 capital programme.

91. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Executive considered a report from the Chief Financial Officer highlighting the financial issues facing the Council which were required to be taken into consideration as part of the budget setting process for 2022/23.

When introducing the report the Executive Member for Finance and Housing stated that he felt that the report, written by the Chief Finance Officer, was an excellent piece of work that highlighted the annual budget changes, pressures on service and efficiencies. It was noted that a challenging target of efficiencies of around £5m were being looked at for the next financial year.

In relation to the major financial risks outlined in the report, which included the adult social care reform, Councillor Margetts advised that in order to raise the profile of this issue he was liaising with other Berkshire authorities to encourage them to look at the impact the reforms would have on their finances. As West Berkshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Councils faced similar issues to Wokingham the Lead Members from those authorities had written to Savid Javid to highlight the issues the Councils were facing. Whilst the reforms were very welcome in their attempts to review social care there was not currently enough funding available to support the reforms.

Councillor Murray drew attention to the table showing the net annual benefit of £42 per Band D property in 2022/23, £55.21 in 2023/24 and £62.47 in 2024/25 and it was confirmed that this net benefit was income generated from assets and investments. Councillor Kaiser reminded the meeting that the Council was the lowest grant funded unitary authority in the country therefore very little money was received from the Government.

Councillor Halsall highlighted that the Council received around £65m in business rates but only retained around £15m as due to the relevant calculations the remainder had to be given to the Government. Councillor Halsall also drew Members' attention to the Asset Value, Debt Levels and Repayment Profiles table within the report which showed that the

net indebtedness was forecast to be £177m, rising to £300m in 2022/23, then reducing year on year.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) report and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks, be noted and that the Executive consider these when setting the council tax for 2022/23 and agreeing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP);
- 2) the Council's response to the local government finance settlement, as set out in Appendix Two to the report, be supported;
- 3) the Council's ongoing representations for fairer funding for the residents of Wokingham Borough Council be supported.

92. OPTALIS CONTRACT RENEWAL 2022

(Councillors John Halsall, John Kaiser and Charles Margetts declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item.

Councillor Stuart Munro took over the Chair for this item only)

The Executive considered a report setting out the procurement business case to renew the contract for adult care services with Optalis Ltd.

During his introduction of the report the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development highlighted the amount of work that had gone into the contract. Three years ago Optalis was exclusively focussed on growth however the Council's view was that it should be focussing on quality and value. Two years of negotiations followed with the result that £2.5m was returned to the Council and the company had been restructured which had led to three boards of Directors being reduced to one. Optalis was now a more flexible and agile company, with the Council's operation separated from the overall company which meant that the Council could focus on the service it required for Wokingham residents.

Councillor Munro confirmed that the contract would enable the Council to use Optalis as a provider which would help ensure against rising and variable care costs from other providers and would also enable the development of new services to suit the needs of its residents.

RECOMMENDATION that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve the procurement business case, as set out in the report, to renew the contract to Optalis;
- 2) delegate authority to the Director of Adult Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Adult Services to;
 - a) approve and complete the contract with Optalis for £7.3mil – 2022-23; and
 - b) undertake all activities required to complete the joint ownership arrangements between RBWM and the Council as set out under the heading 'Future Arrangements'.

- 3) delegate jointly to the Director of Adult Services and the Director of Resources and Assets authority to add to and remove services within Optalis during the term of the contract provided that in each case, up to the total value of £500k:
 - a) the budget for the costs of the services has already been approved as part of the agreed Council Budget;
 - b) the business case has been approved by both Directors;
 - c) the Executive Member with responsibility for Adult Services and the Executive Member with responsibility for Finance have been consulted.
- 4) note the shareholders agreement.

93. RUSCOMBE NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN - REGULATION 16 CONSULTATION AND FUTURE EXAMINATION

The Executive considered a report relating to the proposed consultation on the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan which if approved would sit alongside the Council's planning policies to help shape how development was managed in that area.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) a 6-week consultation on the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1a and 1b of the report) be approved; and
- 2) an examiner be appointed to independently examine the Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan, delegating the appointment and submission of the examination documentation to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning and Enforcement.

94. LEISURE STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Leisure Strategy following consultation.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised that the Leisure Strategy sets out plans to help residents' physical and emotional wellbeing through the Council's extensive leisure offerings and partnership with a wide range of other organisations. The four key priorities of the Strategy were:

- Promoting health and wellbeing of residents;
- Raising participation and reducing levels of inactivity;
- Maintaining and extending accessibility to indoor leisure services; and
- Maintaining and extending accessibility to outdoor spaces.

Councillor Batth reminded Members that consultation on the draft Strategy had been carried out between April-July 2021. The main areas of feedback from residents were that they wanted more sports facilities and classes, more options for young people and more outdoor activities. In response to this feedback the Council had been working with the Youth Council and community teams to develop new programmes and facilities to encourage more young people and teenagers to get active.

In addition, sessions would be targeted for the Borough's black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The Council would review its current programme of activities and identify sessions which were popular with those communities and encourage more residents to get

involved and get physically active. The offer for older people would also be expanded as set out in the Strategy.

Councillor Batth reiterated the significant health benefits of sports and leisure for everyone including, raising achievement in schools plus being very important in the prevention of mental and physical illnesses.

In addition to the key leisure partners outlined previously Councillor Batth mentioned the strong sports and leisure community at Pinewood and the importance of the Council's relationship with these organisations. He advised that there was a commitment to develop these valuable facilities in the future.

Councillor Kaiser stated that he was glad to see that towns and parishes were mentioned in the partnership delivery section of the Leisure Strategy. Towns and parishes often had funds available and therefore work could be undertaken with them to deliver better services in facilities that they either currently run or assist them in implementing new projects.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) the principles and content of the Leisure Strategy be endorsed;
- 2) the Leisure Strategy and action plan, with the amends incorporated following consultations and feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, be approved.

95. WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to launch a consultation with stakeholders on moving to a whole council (all-out) electoral cycle.

The Leader of Council reiterated the financial pressures that were facing the Council now and in the future. These included the Adult Health and Social Care Bill which would cost around £27m, the likelihood of losing the New Homes Bonus of £4m, settling the Negative Schools Grant of £10m as well as other inflationary pressures and cost increases which represented more than £50m of increases. Therefore, as the Council's finances were likely to be severely stretched there was a need to look at areas where savings could be made in order to protect Council services.

Councillor Halsall advised that one area that was currently being considered was the Council's electoral cycle i.e moving from the current process which was the election of a third of Councillors each year, apart from the fourth year, to whole Council elections, an election every fourth year for all Councillors. Moving to whole Council elections could potentially save £4.5m over a four-year cycle.

It was noted that the Boundary Commission was currently undertaking an electoral (boundary) review and as part of this process the Council was required to consider the electoral system it wished to use. The options were:

- Continue with election by thirds (an election every year apart from the fourth) of one third of the wards. All wards would have to be three councillor wards, which was a change to the current process.

- Whole Council elections (an election every fourth year) for all seats which could be either one councillor, two councillor or three councillor wards reflecting communities or all single councillor wards.

Because the Boundary Commission believed that every resident should have equal access to democracy, they wanted all voters to have the opportunity either to vote every year or every four years. The current process meant that if you lived in Arborfield you only got to vote once every four years but if you lived in Shinfield you had the ability to vote every year. Elections by thirds was also very expensive and highly disruptive.

Councillor Halsall confirmed that as a consequence of the Boundary Commission's electoral review whole Council elections would have to take place in 2024. He further advised that most Councils had either moved to whole Council elections or were moving to them. It was noted that MPs were elected for a maximum of five years and PCCs, town and parish councils and mayors were all elected every four years.

As set out in the report Councillor Halsall highlighted that there would need to be a public consultation on whether to change the Council's electoral cycle and to this end the Executive was being asked to recommend to Council that a consultation take place. A special Council meeting would be required to be held in the Summer to consider whether to change the Council's electoral cycle. It was noted that a two thirds majority at that meeting would be required to make the change.

RECOMMENDATION: That Council be recommended to agree to launch a consultation with stakeholders on moving to a whole council (all-out) electoral cycle.

96. CENTRAL AND EASTERN BERKSHIRE JOINT MINERALS AND WASTE PLAN: MAIN MODIFICATIONS CONSULTATION

The Executive considered a report relating to a proposal to consult on the Central and Eastern Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications (The Joint Plan) and supporting documents.

The Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement went through the report and reminded the meeting that the Examination in Public had taken place during September/October last year at which a number of modifications came forward. This report was therefore asking for Executive to recommend to Council the main modifications and supporting documentation for consultation. Councillor Smith confirmed that, despite posts to the contrary on social media, there were no sites in Wokingham Borough contained in the Plan.

RECOMMENDATION that Council be recommended to:

- 1) agree the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and supporting documentation for publication and public consultation;
- 2) authorise community engagement on the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and associated supporting documents to take place for at least 6 weeks from February 2022 onwards;
- 3) authorise the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement, to agree minor amendments necessary to

the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan: Main Modifications and other supporting documents prior to consultation.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.15 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Also Present

Helen Thompson, Ernst and Young
Stephan Van Der Merwe, Ernst & Young
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Graham Cadle, Interim Assistant Director Finance
Graham Ebers, Deputy Chief Executive
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance
Mark Thompson, Chief Accountant

47. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Gee and Loyes.

48. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 30 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Item 40 - 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.

Councillor Shepherd DuBey referred to the Climate Emergency audit being requested by the Audit Committee in addition to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and sought further clarification. The Assistant Director Governance agreed to update as part of the Corporate Risk Register item.

49. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Imogen Shepherd-DuBey declared a general Personal Interest on the grounds that she had money in the Berkshire Pension Fund.

50. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no Public questions.

51. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

52. CORPORATE PLAN - ANNUAL REVIEW

This item was deferred to the 30 March meeting to enable it to be considered alongside the Statement of Accounts.

Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked that it be updated for the next Committee meeting.

**53. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL AUDIT COMMITTEE PROGRESS REPORT
- UPDATE ON THE 2020/21 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Committee received an update on the 2020-21 statement of accounts.

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

- Helen Thompson advised that the report had been co-authored with Council officers.
- The audit was well progressed. However, both the Council and EY teams had had to balance priorities and sickness. In addition, the delayed start to the audit had had an impact on progress.
- At the end of December there had still been 60% of local audits in progress and this number was gradually reducing.
- Helen Thompson went on to highlight how progress was assessed.
- It was noted that even had all the work within the Council's and EY's control been completed it would not have been possible to sign the Financial Statements following the Committee meeting as the letter received from the Pension Fund auditor had stated that work was ongoing and that there could still be issues arising. They were expected to report in early March, allowing the accounts to be presented at the Committee's extraordinary meeting at the end of March.
- With regards to Housing Benefits, the report had stated that the deadline was the 31 January. This had since been extended by the Department of Work and Pensions, to 28 February. Procedures were in place to monitor the Housing Benefits audit.
- The Interim Assistant Director Finance emphasised that his previous local authority had been in a similar position and faced similar challenges. He felt that the Council and EY teams had a positive relationship and way of working. He was confident that the March deadline would be met.
- Councillor Sargeant commented that the report stated that it was not possible to access the detailed models of the actuaries and that EY were producing their own estimates. He questioned whether these estimates were being used by other auditors of Berkshire authorities, and what would be the outcome should there be a material difference between EY's estimates and those of the actuaries. Helen Thompson explained that the 2021 audits had been impacted by the revised auditing standards ISA on estimates, which had brought in more rigorous requirements in terms of looking at models. A range rather than a precise materiality level was being worked to, so that if when the liability was recalculated using the same information as the actuaries, the figure arrived at was within 2% (plus or minus) of the total liability. Helen Thompson indicated that of the audits that she had been involved in, they had all come within range apart from one, and this had been as a result of an error by the actuaries, which had then been corrected. The report was expected imminently, and it was anticipated that there would be any issues.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey referred to the valuation of land, building property, plant and equipment, and investment properties. She questioned whether there were any material differences in the valuation of properties that remained unresolved, and if so, how much they amounted to, and the differences that would result in properties being recorded at a lower or higher value than proposed by Officers. Helen Thompson indicated that work was still ongoing, so it was not currently possible to answer this question. She explained the valuations process.
- With regards to going concern, Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked whether EY had any concerns in this area, particularly in light of the forthcoming Adult Social Care Bill. Helen Thompson indicated that the focus was on the disclosures made by management regarding the Council's financial position, which linked to the Medium-

Term Financial Plan. EY were mindful of the pressures that the Adult Social Care Bill would create. The Deputy Chief Executive emphasised that the Council was facing unprecedented times in terms of unknowns and how big these could potentially be. The Council would do all that it could to ensure that a Section 114 declaration was not required. He was confident that it would not.

RESOLVED: That the update on the 2020-21 Statement of accounts be noted.

54. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Committee considered the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-2025.

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

- The Committee had received the Mid Year report in November 2021.
- Councillor Sargeant referred to the graph detailing the Capital Funding Programme 2022/23 to 2024/25, and questioned whether the CIL and S106 forwarded funding was expected to continue beyond 2022/2023. The Interim Assistant Director Finance indicated that this represented the CIL that was currently being funded in advance of receiving, and could be subject to change.
- With regards to capital assets, such as Carnival Pool car park, Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned whether the impact of losses to property values had been taken into consideration and what impact they would have on the Strategy. The Interim Assistant Director Finance commented that the immediate effect of a loss on the valuation would not affect the General Fund. An adjustment was made so that the Revenue Account properly reflected the financial rather than the accounting position. The Chief Accountant indicated that a revaluation exercise would be carried out as part of the accounts. Any losses or gains would be at the point that an asset was disposed of, in terms of realisable losses or gains.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey stated that some local authorities were not charging Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) on debt related to certain assets. Whilst some authorities were making Minimum Revenue Provision for commercial investments funded by borrowing, some were still not paying MRP regarding borrowing related to borrowing associated with investment assets or capital loans. The statutory guidance was clear that financing for investment assets and capital loans required the provision to be made. She asked what the Council was doing to prepare for these changes and what the implications would be for revenue and services. The Interim Assistant Director Finance advised that the current provision was in line with the regulations which allowed for the Chief Financial Officer to make a prudent provision. There was currently a consultation to change those arrangements, which would finish on 8 February. Officers were feeding into this.
- In response to a question from Councillor Ross regarding the rate of inflation, the Interim Assistant Director Finance, indicated that future borrowing could become more expensive as interest rates grew. Advice from external partners around future borrowing was being sought. Inflation could affect the cost of capital programmes. Monitoring was being undertaken and contingencies were being built into a number of the capital programmes.
- In response to a question from Councillor Shepherd-DuBey, the Interim Assistant Director Finance stated that the Strategy and approach were kept under review and would be changed as required. The Chief Accountant added that with regards to the Town Centre regeneration, all the income generated was covering the financing costs so there was no impact to the tax payer. It was forecasted that this income would be in excess of financing costs over the next few years and would contribute returns to the General Fund. The Deputy Chief Executive added, that with all the supported borrowing where the Council was undertaking a scheme that paid for the costs of the financing, and often generated income in addition to that, Officers kept the performance under review. If it was not achieving its intended return, this would be factored into future Medium Term Financial Plans.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee support the Treasury Management Strategy 2022-2025 and recommend to Council to:

- 1) approve the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A including the following additional appendices;
 - a) Prudential Indicators (Appendix B)
 - b) Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23 (Appendix C)
 - c) Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D)
- 2) note the cumulative financial impact on the Council of its borrowing activities equates to a net credit to the general fund for the taxpayer of £42.70 per band D equivalent at end of 2022/23 and noting this credit increases to £62.47 at the end of 2024/25.

55. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Committee considered the Corporate Risk Register. In addition the Deputy Chief Executive took Members through risks that related to his Directorate.

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

- There were no new risks.
- The Assistant Director highlighted follow up actions taken with regards to three areas previously raised.
- More detail had been provided about the Climate Emergency risk. Members were advised that the internal audit of Climate Emergency was underway, and the Internal Audit team were working in collaboration with Price Waterhouse Cooper. It was expected that the findings of the audit would be reported to the next Committee meeting. A query had been raised around carbon accounting, which was a very new area for local authorities. Options were being looked at around the 2022/23 internal audit plan to provide assurance around that particular specialist area. Climate Emergency UK, another independent source of assurance, had rated the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan as 8th in the country amongst single tier authorities. The Deputy Chief Executive added that it had been rated 1st for governance and development.
- With regards to the Adult Social Care supplier risk a more detailed description had been provided around the mitigations.
- With regards to the High Needs Block risk and the delay around the opening of the Winnersh Farm School, which was now due to open in 2023, the impact was being quantified and would continue to be monitored.
- A correction to the summary matrix was noted.
- The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the financial risks. The nature of local government finance meant that work was undertaken to mitigate the risks, but additional risks and challenges continued to arise. The Chief Finance Officer's report highlighted many of these risks. There was a significant number of unknowns in terms of impact. Monitoring and mitigations would continue to be carried out.
- The level of inflation over the course of the next year and beyond was unknown. The Council would try to provide for the impact of inflation, in the context of individual schemes and a corporate contingency. The Deputy Chief Executive emphasised the need for a sufficiency of safeguard but not an over sufficiency.
- The Adult Social Care reform did not start until October 2023 although onboarding staff to deal with its implications would begin prior to this, so costs would be felt earlier. The reforms could potentially have an impact on the Council of over

£20million a year, although the full impact was not likely to be felt until year 5, suggesting a graduated impact.

- The Local Government Finance settlement was another area of uncertainty, which had been received for 2022/23 only. A longer-term settlement had been expected and would have provided more financial security, which helped the Council's financial planning. A strong levelling up agenda was not likely to be favourable to Wokingham, which was the lowest funded unitary. The Council would continue to make the case for funding.
- The outcome of the MRP consultation was awaited. The outcome could mean that the Council could be required to pay back debt, or provide for the repayment of debt, quicker.
- The Council was in strong financial position, particularly in comparison to some other authorities. The General Fund indicators were moving in a positive direction. The only less positive indicator was HRA reserves which were reducing, but were still at a reasonable level.
- With regards to monitoring performance against the budget, Councillors received the Capital Monitoring reports and Treasury Management reports. Councillor Sargeant asked what additional monitoring processes were in place. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the publicly reported figures were high level. More frequent and detailed monitoring was carried out, some of which was on a daily basis.
- Councillor Younis referred to the workforce risk and questioned how confident Officers were that the Council could appoint the right people. He emphasised the importance of the Council's workforce to its success. The Deputy Chief Executive commented that there would always be some challenges around recruitment and a level of interims and agency staff. It was about managing this to an acceptable level. Paying at the right level to attract and retain, was important. Other factors such as the Council being considered a good place to work, were also important. These factors were part of the work being undertaken as part of the Workplace Imagined Project.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey asked about the likely cost of the delay of the opening of the Winnersh Farm School and was informed that negotiations with the Department of Education were in progress.
- Councillor Shenton commented that one of the actions required regarding the Climate Emergency risk was a behaviour change leading to increased public transport usage. Public transport usage was down on pre pandemic levels and working from home had increased. Bus operators could potentially say that existing services or routes could not be maintained without further financial contribution from the Council. He questioned whether this had been taken into consideration for the risk level for Climate Emergency. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that this was a big emerging issue. There was likely to be Government consideration as to how public transport would be supported going forwards. The Council would need to keep this issue under review and work with the Government and partners.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey questioned whether increased construction costs and the impact of this on capital projects had been considered under the financial risks and was informed that this was part of the considerations around inflation.
- In response to a question from Councillor Ross, the Deputy Chief Executive commented that many local authorities were far less financially resilient, and problems would reveal themselves elsewhere, earlier.

RESOLVED: That the risks and mitigating actions of the Corporate Risk register be noted.

56. INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Assistant Director Governance presented a report regarding an independent member of the Audit Committee.

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

- The Audit Committee had undertaken a self-assessment against CIPFA guidance on best practice for audit committees in local government. One of the areas identified for further consideration was the inclusion/appointment of an independent member to the Committee. The Corporate Peer Challenge had also highlighted that it should be considered whether the appointment of an independent member to the Audit Committee would strengthen governance.
- It was noted that the primary considerations when considering Audit Committee membership should be maximising the committee's knowledge base and skills, being able to demonstrate objectivity and independence, and having a membership that will work together.
- It was clarified that an independent member would not have voting rights.
- Councillor Shepherd-DuBey queried how the independent member's performance would be assessed and what action would be taken (e.g., no longer paid) should they not attend meetings. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that there would be a robust selection process. What would be expected of the independent member would be made clear and built into the selection process as would any assessment criteria.
- Members questioned how the appointment of an independent member would re-enforce political neutrality and the independence of the committee. The Assistant Director Governance indicated that the CIPFA guidance advised they would help ensure that the Committee focused on the Council's overall governance arrangements, as apolitically as possible. Councillor Sargeant added that he felt that the level of debate and political neutrality was already good, but an independent member would help to give the debate an even more open and neutral feel.
- Councillor Younis commented that it was important that it was made clear to the independent member, what the consequence would be should they not meet expectations.
- Councillor Ross asked whether job descriptions used by other Council's when appointing an independent Audit Committee member had been consulted and was informed that they were.
- Councillor Ross questioned whether the allowance amount should be referred to in the recommendation to Council. The Assistant Director Governance explained that this would be taken from an existing budget so additional funds would not be required.
- It was confirmed that it would be a 5 year appointment and that this would be made clear at the time of appointment.

RESOLVED: That the proposal to co-opt an independent member onto the committee having been reviewed and discussed, Audit Committee agree that:

- 1) the independent member role profile be approved.
- 2) it be recommended to Council that:
 - a) an Independent member be co-opted on to the Audit Committee on a non-voting basis and that the Constitution be updated accordingly to reflect this.

- b) the role profile be approved.
- c) the appointment of the independent member be delegated to the Audit Committee
- d) the process for selecting and recommending an appropriate candidate be delegated to the Assistant Director Governance in consultation with the Chair of the Audit Committee.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PERSONNEL BOARD
HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 6.45 PM TO 8.05 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), John Kaiser (Vice-Chairman), Pauline Helliars-Symons, Stephen Conway and Simon Weeks

Officers Present

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Christine Bennett, Interim Assistant Director HR & OD
Andrew Moulton, Assistant Director Governance

17. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Jones participated virtually in the meeting and did not vote on the items.

18. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 10 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

21. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

22. RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTORS AND ASSISTANT DIRECTORS (PERMANENT AND INTERIM)

The Board received a report regarding the recruitment and appointment of Directors and Assistant Directors (Permanent and Interim).

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

- Councillor Halsall commented that the changing employment market and specific projects meant a greater need for interims than in the past.
- The changes to the Constitution had also previously been considered by the Constitution Working Group.
- Councillor Conway queried the reference to the 'gig economy' within the background information and questioned if it was likely to have an impact on Director and Assistant Director level staff at interim level.
- Councillor Bishop-Firth agreed with Councillor Conway that the background information would benefit from being amended. She emphasised that the reason an interim Director or Assistant Director would be required was if their specialist skills were required for a limited period or a gap needed to be filled for a temporary period. It was agreed that the background information could be simplified.

- Councillor Bishop-Firth noted it was recommended that an interim appointment could currently be made for up to 12 months and that it was proposed that this could be extended subject to the agreement of either the Chief Executive or Director in consultation with various specific Members. She questioned whether this should be longer, for example 18 months, and referred to handover periods and instances where staff may wish to take maternity leave, and 12 months was less appropriate.
- Councillor Kaiser commented that some interims were on high wages and that he would not be confident extending an initial appointment beyond 12 months before a review was implemented.
- Councillor Bishop Firth questioned whether there should be greater flexibility so that an interim could be appointed for 18 months but there be a review period built in after 12 months, to enable better planning. Councillor Weeks indicated that there was an opportunity to review after 12 months within the proposed amendments to the Constitution, so he felt that this was not necessary.
- The Assistant Director Governance informed Members that the Constitution Review Working Group had recommended that should the appointment be extended after 12 months, there be a further review period after another 6 months.
- Councillor Conway referred to the changes to the Constitution. He felt that the Member involvement in the process was quite narrow and pointed out that the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Personnel Board were currently the same person. Councillor Halsall commented that there were no guarantees that the Leader and Chairman would be the same person going forwards. He emphasised that the Chief Executive in the case of interim Directors and the Directors, in the case of Interim Assistant Directors, would be consulting the specific Members and were ultimately the decision makers, as opposed to the Members.
- The makeup of Members being consulted in the appointment process was discussed in detail. Councillor Weeks suggested that it be added that should the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Personnel Board be the same person, the Vice Chairman of the Personnel Board would also be consulted, so as to ensure scrutiny of the process by three Members as opposed to two.
- Councillor Hellier Symons stated that working practices were changing and the appointment of interims was becoming more necessary. With regards to the makeup of Members consulted in the appointment process she suggested that the Leader and two members of Personnel Board be consulted.
- Councillor Halsall emphasised that the process should not be too onerous on the Chief Executive or the Directors and needed to enable them to act quickly.
- In response to a question from Councillor Helliier-Symons, the Assistant Director Governance explained that there were separate arrangements for the appointment of the Monitoring Officer, the Head of Paid Service, and the Section 151 Officer, which were ultimately Council appointments. With regards to the involvement of Members in the appointment process he added that the Corporate Leadership Team had felt that the proposal detailed in the report struck the appropriate balance between achieving sufficient oversight and authority and not unduly delaying the process. There was currently no Member involvement in the Interim appointment process.
- Councillor Jones questioned what the Chief Executive's views were on the changes to the appointment process. The Assistant Director Governance confirmed that the proposals had been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team who were satisfied with them.
- The involvement of the relevant Executive Member in the process was clarified. Councillor Halsall commented that the relevant Executive Member was particularly

key in the interim Assistant Director appointment process as they worked closely with them.

- Councillor Kaiser felt that the change to the appointment process would help to support the Chief Executive and Directors. He felt that the views of the Corporate Leadership Team should be sought on any changes to the proposals detailed in the report before the Board considered them.
- Councillor Conway suggested that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Personnel Board and the Leader of the Opposition be consulted. He felt that this would ensure that the process was not political.
- Councillor Halsall felt that a simple appointment process was necessary to expedite the process.
- Following further discussion, Councillor Conway proposed that the relevant Executive Member, the Chairman of the Personnel Board, and the Leader of the Opposition be consulted in the interim appointment process. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Helliars-Symons. Following a vote this proposal was lost. It was agreed that the paper be withdrawn and CLT be consulted on the proposed amendments put forwards by Councillor Conway to those Members who were being consulted in the interim appointment process. It was further agreed that the views of CLT and the report be brought back to the next meeting of the Personnel Board for consideration.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) CLT be consulted on the proposal that the relevant Executive Member, Chairman of Personnel Board and the Leader of the Opposition be consulted prior to the extension of the contract of an Interim Director or Assistant Director following an initial 12 month appointment;
- 2) The views of CLT and the report be brought back to the next Personnel Board meeting for consideration.

23. HR UPDATE REPORT - PUBLICATION OF HR ACTIVITY ON COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

The Board received the HR Update report.

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

- The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD advised that the Council was required to produce a Gender Pay Gap report and a report setting out the Council's involvement in the Government's apprenticeship scheme.
- Councillor Bishop-Firth noted that it had not been possible to maximise the benefit of the entire apprenticeship levy. She questioned how much it had not been possible to use, approximately how many apprenticeship places this equated to, and what alternatives had been considered. She went on to ask whether more IT apprentices could be taken on by the Council. The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD stated that the levy was a pot which accumulated over time, and after a number of years, this money was lost. At the moment, the pot, which the Council was trying to use, was quite high. The scheme had been modified a number of times by the Government, so it was no longer so age limited. There had to be a development portion within the role. It was noted that there were detailed requirements for support within the scheme. so sometimes there was not sufficient time to support individuals going through the scheme, particularly in schools.

- Members were advised that it was Apprenticeship Week next week. There would be a push and promotion across the Council so that consideration be given to whether any vacancies could be converted into apprenticeship posts. It was quite a slow process, but there was a dedicated resource in HR working on the apprenticeship scheme. Work was being undertaken to ensure that areas in the Council such as IT had apprentices where possible.
- Councillor Bishop-Firth suggested that the Personnel Board would be interested in monitoring how the Council was maximising the levy.
- Councillor Helliart-Symons praised the presentation of the report. She referred to some of the challenges with the existing apprenticeship pathway, specifically the fact that there was a level 3 Teaching Assistant and Level 6 Teacher apprenticeship but nothing in-between to bridge the gap and allow Teaching Assistants to progress. She questioned whether this was the result of legislation or Council policy and was informed that it down to how the scheme had been set up by the Government. Some Councils were feeding back to the Government around some of the challenges around the scheme, particularly around the shortage of Teaching Assistants.
- Councillor Weeks questioned how many of the 73 apprentices worked for the Council and how many worked for maintained schools. The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD agreed to feed back to Members. The majority worked for the Council.
- Councillor Kaiser asked whether in the event the Council took on a major contract, if it was possible to include that the Council would like the partner to take on some apprentices. The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD agreed to ascertain this and feed back to the Board. It was unlikely to be legal that the Council insisted that the partners took on apprentices, but it was probable that they could ask that this be considered. Councillor Weeks indicated that often when it came to planning applications for larger projects, it was a requirement that apprentices be taken on.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Gender, Pay Gap report that will be published before 30 March 2022 be noted.
- 2) the report setting out the Council's involvement in the Government's apprenticeship scheme be noted.

24. COVID 19 VACCINATION POLICY

The Board received the Covid 19 Vaccination Policy.

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

- Last year the Government had passed legislation that anyone working in a CQC registered care setting had to be fully vaccinated. Whilst it was still law it was likely to be repealed in the future. The Government were consulting on the repeal arrangements.
- Some staff had been previously told prior to Christmas that if they were not fully vaccinated, they may be redeployed or dismissed. The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD indicated that she would be speaking with Directors, whilst this requirement was still law, about redeploying impacted staff or putting them on restrictive duties, as opposed to dismissing them. There were already difficulties in recruiting in the care sector.

- Councillor Halsall questioned when clarification was likely and was informed that there was a 12 week consultation so by the end of the year was likely. The Council was required to have a policy whilst the requirement for care sectors workers to be fully vaccinated remained law.
- Members agreed that dismissal should be a last resort measure.
- Councillor Kaiser expressed concern that the Council would need to pay additional agency costs to cover staff to undertake the duties of unvaccinated staff who were being deployed elsewhere or put on restrictive duties. The Interim Assistant Director HR & OD explained that only between 6-10 members of staff were impacted. All staff were encouraged to be fully vaccinated.

RESOLVED: That the Covid 19 Vaccination Policy be approved.

25. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

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

26. AGENCY REPORT

The Board received the Agency report.

RESOLVED: That the recommendations set out in Part 2 of the report be agreed.

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.00 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Rachel Burgess, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Norman Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring, Peter Dennis, John Halsall, Clive Jones and Maria Gee

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Andy Glencross, Assistant Director, Highways and Transport
Martin Heath, Traffic Management, Parking and Road Safety Team Manager

26. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Paul Fishwick and Pauline Helliard-Symons.

Chris Bowring and Peter Dennis attended the meeting as substitutes.

27. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

30. CALL-IN OF EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

The Committee considered two reports relating to the Call-In of an Individual Executive Member Decision (IEMD) relating to the proposed Wokingham Borough-wide Off Street Car Parks Order 2021. The first report, set out at Agenda pages 5 to 22, gave details of the Executive Member decision and the subsequent Call-In. The second report, set out at Agenda pages 23 to 26, set out the Officer response to the Call-In.

The first report stated that an IEMD meeting was held on 16 December 2021 to consider the proposed Wokingham Borough-wide Off Street Car Parks Order 2021. The IEMD report stated that the Council needed to make changes to its existing Off-Street Borough Car Parks Order in line with the Borough-wide parking management improvement plan. The main purpose of these changes was stated as:

- Enabling the Council to enforce against increasing instances of anti-social behaviour in existing car parks;
- Providing a separate Order for existing and new Park and Ride car parks;
- Responding to resident requests for clarity on charging;
- Limiting the maximum stay permitted at California Crossroads car Park;

- Incorporating provisions enabling the Council to designate electric vehicle charging parking bays in any Off-Street Car Parks.

Following consideration of the report, the decision was taken to:

- Instruct officers to proceed with the making of relevant Off-street Car Parks Traffic Regulation Orders;
- Instruct officers to write to all objectors and to advise them of this decision.

The report confirmed that Section 1.4.2 of the Council's Constitution stated that all decisions of the Council will be made in accordance with the following principles:

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- c) human rights will be respected and considered at an early stage in the decision making process;
- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes; and
- f) when decisions are taken by the Executive, details of the options which were taken into account and the reasons for the decision will be recorded.

In line with the Council's Constitution, the Individual Executive Member Decision was called-in, on 23 December 2021, by Councillors Boyt, Bray, Conway, Doran and Jones.

The Call-In was submitted on the basis that:

"The decision has contravened Section 1.4.2 a), d) and e) of the Council's Constitution, insofar as it cannot be determined from the information provided, whether the action is proportionate to the desired outcome and 1.4.2 e) there is no clarity of aims and desired outcomes."

The second report – the Officer response – stated that the decision to approve the Wokingham Borough-Wide Off-Street Car Parks Order 2021 and the preceding formal public consultations had been undertaken in accordance with the Council's Constitution and the statutory requirements for a Traffic Regulation Order. This was the same approach that the Council followed for all other Traffic Regulation Order changes and was an open and transparent process which allowed the comments and objections of residents to be considered by the Council.

The report stated that the IEMD report made clear that there were a number of reasons for bringing forward the Wokingham Borough-Wide Off-Street Car Parks Order 2021, but that it was primarily about updating some out of date information in the previous order and separating the town centre car parks from the new Park and Ride sites. Alongside this Officers took the opportunity to introduce some additional measures which would improve

the Council's ability to address anti-social behaviour within car parks following experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In relation to the specific questions raised as part of the Call-In, the report provided the following responses:

Question 1 - What are the recommendations made by Thames Valley Police? Are they proportionate to the problem? What happens where ASB is committed but (as is likely to be the case) the perpetrator does not register his/her vehicle?

Answer - Following a series of ASB episodes affecting our Carnival M/S car park, park and ride sites and other Council operated car parks during the COVID lockdown period, Thames Valley Police made recommendations to the Community Safety Team and Parking Services that time periods in which car parks operate should be considered as deterrents to antisocial behaviour. The police also recommended the introduction of CCTV to provide evidential support to any enforcement action that may become possible by police. Such measures exist in other local authority areas and police advised that they are a successful deterrent as stated at the meeting.

Question 2 - This implies that everyone using the car parks in the evening and on a Sunday will have to register their vehicle and check in and out. What evidence is there that perpetrators of anti-social behaviour will comply with this requirement? If they do not, how does this requirement assist with identifying them?

Answer - The Wokingham Borough-Wide Off-Street Car Parks Order 2021 will provide the Council with the flexibility to introduce the requirement to check in and out in the evenings and on a Sunday in the future, as the need to address any issue arises.

Question 3 - How will this requirement impact on residents who use the car park and forget to check in? Will enforcement officers be active 24/7? What is included in the policy that would avoid innocent residents being fined simply for failing to display a ticket during times when there is no charge for using the car park? How are residents being informed of the change, which will require them to have a ticket at all times, when previously there was no requirement and people used to using the car park would not even look at the ticket machines overnight or on a Sunday?

Answer - The Wokingham Borough-Wide Off-Street Car Parks Order 2021 makes no changes to the requirement for car park users to check in and anyone who forgets to check in will be liable to penalty just as they are now. Enforcement officers will be active for those periods when enforcement is necessary to ensure that car park terms and conditions are being met. Residents will be informed of the requirement check in or obtain a ticket on signs within the car parks just as they are now. In the event that we are making changes to our car park terms and conditions we will of course ensure that these are appropriately communicated through the local press and our various social media channels.

Question 4 - The supporting CCTV will help to deter ASB, but can it be used to prosecute offenders?

Answer - Yes our CCTV can be used to assist in the prosecution of offenders.

Question 5 - Members have been told variously that the CCTV cameras were installed due to theft of catalytic converters, to reduce emissions caused by queuing cars, and now to deter ASB. Section 1.4.2 d) states there should be a presumption of 'openness'. This is not apparent here.

Answer - The CCTV cameras within our car park and out on the Borough highway network have primarily been introduced to reduce congestion, shorten journey times and enable residents to make effective choices on where to park. However, the same cameras are also capable of providing evidence of ASB and other crimes within our car parks and will assist us to address these issues.

Shirley Boyt addressed the Committee and explained the reasons which had led to the Call-In. Councillor Boyt stated that one of the most important roles of a Councillor was being able to explain to residents the reasons for decisions made by the Council. In the case of the TRO the initial consultation had been poorly executed in terms of deploying the notices. There was confusion amongst residents about the purpose of the order, leading many residents to conclude that the purpose was to introduce charges in the evenings and on Sundays. As there were several car parks in her ward Councillor Boyt was keen to see clarity on the matter of charging.

Ahead of the IEMD meeting, Councillor Boyt wrote to the Executive Member to this effect. She hope that the Q&A in the IEMD meeting would address any doubts about the reasoning behind the introduction of charging periods when previously there had been none. Councillor Boyt was surprised about how few questions were asked about the impact of the proposed changes on the average resident. During the meeting the Officer's verbal explanation was not wholly consistent with the written report. This left Councillor Boyt with more questions than answers. These questions formed the basis of the Call-In. Before initiating the Call-In, Councillor Boyt did seek clarification on a number of points, but did not receive a response.

Councillor Boyt stated that the responses to the Call-In questions in the second report raised further questions which were listed in a note circulated to the Committee, as follows:

The response to question 1 suggests you are confident that these measures will act as a deterrent which is good, but:

- If ASB does occur, are you saying that the perpetrators will be issued with a penalty charge notice simply because they did not check in and were therefore in contravention of the Parking Order?
- Does this mean the actual ASB will not be addressed?

It is also stated that the police recommended the introduction of CCTV to provide evidential support to any enforcement action that may become possible by the police.

- What sort of ASB might be dealt with by the police using CCTV footage?
- Are these new measures proportionate to the problem?
- What alternative measures were explored and disregarded?

The response to question 2, if my understanding is correct, states that the requirement to check in will be implemented should the need arise.

- Does this mean that some borough car parks will require check-in at all times? And others will not?
- Wouldn't this be confusing for our residents?

I am still concerned that innocent residents may be the subject of a penalty charge notice for failing to check in even when there is no charge. In the response to question 3 you state that the order 'makes no changes to the requirement for car park users to check in and anyone who fails to check in will be liable to the penalty just as they are now'. This is not correct! Currently residents are not required to check in and out in the evenings and on a Sunday. This is a material change which will impact on residents - yet it was not raised at all in the decision-making process and raises another question:

- Will blue badge holders also have to check-in?
- If yes, why was no EqIA carried out?
- If no, are they likely to be caught by CCTV monitoring and fined for not checking in?

Response 3 also states that Enforcement Officers will be active for those periods when enforcement is necessary.

- Does this mean they will be working longer hours?
- If so, what are the cost implications for this?

Councillor Boyt stated that it was vital to demonstrate to residents that decisions in this Council were taken on the basis of strong evidence and with consideration of the impact the decision will have on residents. In the light of these unanswered questions, Councillor Boyt requested that the Committee refer the decision back to the Executive Member and ask that when it was retaken, the accompanying report include:

- a point-by-point explanation of the different components of the Off-Street TRO as laid out on page 24 of the agenda of the meeting. Not just saying what the components were, but what their purpose was and how they will achieve it. This was to address the principle of observing openness and transparency in decision-making.
- a detailed explanation of the Council's intentions in regard to fining people whose only offence was not displaying a ticket when they parked at a time when the car park was free. The officer response suggested the Council had every intention of using this new capability to fine people for this, which would be outrageous; it implied the Council was looking at using this change as a way of raising money, using innocent residents as a cash cow.
- Include the actual recommendations from Thames Valley Police and how they would work.
- Where ASB was concerned, lay out the other options that had been considered for tackling ASB in car parks, and explain why the overnight charging system will cure it and why the other ideas had been rejected – or if they haven't, say what else was being done.
- an Equalities Impact Assessment.
- a breakdown of the cost implications of the Order.

Maria Gee addressed the Committee as a witness and made the following comments. The IEMD report stated that the Council needed to make changes to its existing Off-street Borough Car Parks Order. The first purpose of the changes was stated as enabling the Council to enforce against incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in existing car parks. Councillor Gee was speaking to the Committee about the impact on the Carnival Pool car park which, as Members were aware, had suffered from a lot of ASB. Councillor Gee had

looked at the car park terms and conditions. They were measures that the Council could enforce. A penalty charge notice could be issued for contravening any of the terms and conditions. The terms and conditions all referred to “parked”, so parked without displaying a ticket, parked outside the bay, parked in a restricted area, etc. The problem was that ASB, for example illegal car meets, was usually caused by moving vehicles. Some disturbance was caused by stationary vehicles with loud music or shouting late at night. None of the terms and conditions of the car parks referred to moving vehicles or noise, which were the basis of ASB calls from residents relating to this car park. The conditions at the Carnival Pool car park referred to car parking and displaying tickets.

The current way of dealing with ASB was for the police to issue S59 notices which allowed them to give a warning and then seize any vehicles which were acting in a manner likely to distress other people. However, there was nothing in the car park terms and conditions other than references to parking violations. It was likely that the future method of dealing with ASB would still be S59 notices as the Council could only deal with parking violations. The CCTV in place would not change its use to civil parking enforcement. Officers confirmed that CCTV was not an approved advice for issuing parking penalty charge notices (PPCNs). Its future use was going to be the same as its current use, dealing with crimes, issuing S59 notices, theft, etc.

Councillor Gee referred to the “checking in” process – entering a car park and leaving the vehicle without leaving a record of the vehicle. In many car parks, including Carnival Pool, drivers had to check in, but only during charging hours. It was not enforceable outside charging hours. Making users check in with car registrations was useful when looking at violation of car park conditions. PCNs were only useful when vehicles were parked, unless the terms and conditions were changed. If a car was checked in there was no violation of parking conditions even if ASB occurred. If a vehicle was not checked in, parking charge notices could be issued by the Civil Parking Enforcement officers, but the CCTV still could not be used. PCNs were only useful when users were parked because they were parking charge notices. Also, it could be risky for the enforcement officers when there were large car meets. And, how would they establish how long car users had been there given the grace period.

The report stated that the new Off-street Car Parks Order would enable the Council to take action against ASB, but it was not clear how the Council would be able to take action. Extending the operating hours would not enable further action to be taken. ASB occurred outside the current charging hours. If every user was required to check in, irrespective of charging periods, then the burden would fall on people not engaging in ASB.

Finally, residents would be informed of the requirement to check in or obtain a ticket on signs within the car parks, just as they are now. The problem was that the signs were on the payment machines and residents may not realise that they had to register outside of charging hours, as councillor Boyt made clear. It was also proposed that the Council communicate via the local press and social media. That would not help out of Borough visitors to the car parks. Without changes to signage there may be a lot of violations from people not engaged in ASB.

Members of the Committee asked the following questions of Councillors Boyt and Gee:

Do you agree that the TRO in itself cannot achieve any of these aims? Councillor Boyt commented that the TRO appeared to be designed to meet the aims, but it was not clear that it would.

You appear to be calling in this item for reasons that are nothing to do with the TRO. Can you explain that? The TRO does not include measures to tackle ASB. Councillor Boyt stated that she did not agree. The reasons for the Call-In were clearly stated. During the IEMD meeting all the discussion was related to stopping ASB in the car parks.

The IEMD report stated that the purpose of the changes was to allow the Council to introduce parking controls which would enable it to enforce against incidents of ASB in existing car parks. What have Thames valley Police said about measures to tackle ASB? Councillor Gee stated that Thames Valley Police had asked for barriers to be introduced as one of the first measures. This date back 18 months.

Were there any reports about ASB in car parks during the hours when vehicles currently had to register? Councillor Gee stated that the reports she had seen related to car meets taking place in the evenings, normally from 9pm, or 10pm at weekends, sometimes going on until 1am.

When incidents occur how is CCTV accessed? Is someone watching the CCTV 24/7? Councillor Gee confirmed that the CCTV was not monitored. When incidents were reported, officers looked at the relevant footage and could then share it with the police. The onus was on residents to report incidents to the Council.

Other than ASB, were there other ongoing issues in the car parks? Councillor Gee stated that she had heard anecdotal evidence relating to vandalism and drug use/drug dealing.

Are you questioning whether residents were given enough information about this IEMD – I understand that it was advertised in the local newspapers and that Members were aware of it. Only one Member responded to the consultation. Councillor Boyt commented that there was fault at the beginning of the consultation process. Then the decision was made on the basis of the Officer's verbal report, the written report and the questions raised during the meeting. The discussion was about ASB in the car parks and how to address it. The implication appeared to be that everyone would have to check in. This appeared to be a big change and raised a number of issues.

Pauline Jorgensen addressed the Committee, setting out a response to the Call-In request. Councillor Jorgensen stated that the key point was to look at the scope of the IEMD. It was quite wide-reaching and sorted out a number of anomalies in the current structure and processes. It did not just talk about ASB. It added car parks that were missing from the structure and took car parks out where they were no longer valid. We also took the opportunity to change the opening hours and operational hours of the car parks. The operational hours in the documents did not match the operational hours in place in practice. I do not see how these points were disproportionate.

The discussion at the IEMD meeting was reasonably lengthy. It was good to see a member of the public in attendance. There were no Councillors in attendance. There was an opportunity to ask questions but this did not happen. I can only assume that this Call-In is retrospectively political rather than seeking more information. There was ample opportunity to get more information as part of the IEMD process. Also, there were no objections to from any Councillor. Councillor Kerr did raise a question on behalf of a resident. The decision followed a statutory process. There was ample consultation. A number of residents commented on the TRO.

Thames Valley Police were unlikely to act on ASB, so one of the benefits of the extended opening hours was to allow the Council to use its enforcement officers to back up the police. This provided an extra opportunity to deal with ASB. That was one of the points that drove this TRO. Staff will be able to patrol during the extended hours which are already the operational hours. We are not changing what is happening on the ground. We are recognising that car parks are open 24/7 anyway.

My recollection of the IEMD meeting was that the main issue was that many residents had misunderstood and believed that we were going to charge for 24/7 parking which we weren't. The ticketing for charging hours was not addressed in the IEMD. That is because it was not part of the IEMD. The IEMD did not make a decision about people taking a ticket outside the charging hours.

Andy Glencross addressed the meeting and stated that officers were happy with the answers submitted in response to the Call-In questions. From an officer point of view the primary purpose of the TRO had been to tidy up an existing, outdated TRO. 24/7 operation at the car parks was already a fact.

Members of the Committee put the following questions to Councillor Jorgensen and the officers in attendance:

As the car parks are open 24/7 now. Does this TRO change anything in respect of registration? Councillor Jorgensen stated that there was no requirement for tickets outside the hours of charging. Also, there were no changes for Blue Badge owners.

Are you saying that there are no changes to check in-check out outside the charging periods? Councillor Jorgensen stated that there was no requirement outside the charging hours. The TRO enabled its introduction, but there was no current requirement.

What were the changes in enforcement? Andy Glencross stated that this would be an issue for a different meeting – with Community Safety officers present. Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that ASB was important. The TRO provided additional mechanisms to address ASB.

In relation to charging, can you confirm that the TRO makes it easier to introduce changes to charging? Councillor Jorgensen stated that it was possible to make changes at any time through the Executive process. The IEMD did not change anything in this regard.

Members were not politically motivated in relation to the Call-In. They were trying to clarify on the situation. ASB was mentioned many times in the documents. What was the overall solution to the problem of ASB? What was the view of the police? Councillor Jorgensen stated that the police could comment on their views on ASB if approached. CCTV was not part of the IEMD. The TRO provided the opportunity for the Council to use its own enforcement officers.

Are enforcement officers going to tackle issues relating to drugs in car parks? There also appeared to be ongoing confusion about the registration process. Who had to register? Councillor Jorgensen stated that the TRO did not change the position re check-in and check-out. The big issue was car meets in our car parks. Provision of alternative facilities for car meets or measures to tackle drug dealing in car parks were not the subject of this meeting. Councillor Jorgensen was happy to discuss these matters outside the meeting.

There was still confusion about the effect of the TRO on check-in and check-out – can you clarify? Councillor Jorgensen confirmed that the TRO allowed the Council to use its enforcement officers outside normal charging hours in the car parks. If they are patrolling in the car parks, ASB was less likely to occur. Andy Glencross confirmed that the TRO enabled the extension of check-in if necessary, for example in order to tackle ASB, but there were no current changes.

What was the impact of the Call-In on the implementation of the TRO? Councillor Jorgensen stated that implementation had been put on hold pending the Call-In meeting. The TRO was supported by the police and the Community Safety Partnership.

The Thames valley Police Area Commander was due to attend the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March. The Committee would be able to discuss the available options for addressing ASB in the Borough's car parks.

Was there an additional cost to the Council relating to the extra patrolling to be undertaken by the enforcement officers? Councillor Jorgensen stated that extra funding would be delivered by increased parking fines making the extra activity self-funding. Also, there was no Equality Impact Assessment as no decision had been taken which impacted on potentially affected groups, e.g. disabled drivers.

Pauline Jorgensen summed up the response to the Call-In stating that the IEMD had been proportionate with significant consultation on the proposals. The process provided opportunities to ask questions about the decision. The TRO covered much more than issues relating to ASB.

Shirley Boyt summed up the Call-In stating that it was only when watching the IEMD meeting that issues emerged. Councillor Boyt had written to Officers seeking clarification but did not receive a reply. The Call-In was not politically motivated. It arose out of genuine concern about the potential impact on residents. The report did state that a primary purpose was to enable greater control of ASB.

Having listened to the evidence, the Chairman proposed that the Committee vote on whether or not to confirm the Executive Member decision. If the Committee decided to refer the matter back, the debate would continue in order to agree specific recommendations.

On being put to the vote, the Committee agreed to confirm the IEMD relating to the Wokingham Borough-wide Off Street Car Parks Order 2021, taken at the meeting on 16 December 2021.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Member Decision relating to the Wokingham Borough-wide Off Street Car Parks Order 2021 be confirmed.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring (Chairman), Angus Ross (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Stephen Conway, Gary Cowan, Pauline Jorgensen, Rebecca Margetts, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and Bill Soane

Councillors Present and Speaking

Councillors: Stuart Munro

Officers Present

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Chris Easton, Head of Transport, Drainage, and Compliance
Marcia Head, Head of Development Management
Mary Severin, Borough Solicitor

Case Officers Present

Senjuti Manna
Kieran Neumann

71. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Carl Doran and Andrew Mickleburgh.

72. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

73. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Rebecca Margetts made a statement with regards to items 76 and 77, application numbers 213903 and 213927. Rebecca stated that she was a Parish Councillor at Finchampstead Parish Council, who was the applicant for the two applications regarding the War memorial. Rebecca added that she had not been involved with the applications or the committee set up for these applications at the Parish Council and she did not sit on the Planning Committee for the Parish Council. Rebecca stated that she came to the Planning Committee with an open mind, and she would listen to all representations from public speakers, planning officers and members of the Committee prior to coming to any conclusion on either of these applications

74. APPLICATIONS TO BE DEFERRED AND WITHDRAWN ITEMS

Item number 75, application number 213796, was withdrawn from the agenda.

75. APPLICATION NO.213796 - 302 LONDON ROAD, WOKINGHAM, RG40 1RD

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

76. APPLICATION NO.213903 - JUNCTION OF JUBILEE ROAD / B3016

Proposal: Application for Listed Building Consent for the proposed dismantling of war memorial and relocation and reinstallation on new site.

Applicant: Mrs Katy Dagnall (Finchampstead Parish Council)

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 37 to 52.

The Committee were advised that whilst there were no updates contained within the supplementary planning agenda, additional comments and officer responses had been received in relation to this application and had been circulated to the Committee. An additional representation had also been received from the War Memorial Trust, and had been circulated to the Committee.

Ian Adnams, local resident, spoke in objection to the application. Ian maintained that the reasons stated by the Parish Council for relocation of the memorial were not relevant. Ian stated that the Parish Council believed that no significant improvements could be made to the current junction whilst keeping the memorial in its current location, despite a suggestion from himself which would have made the junction safer whilst keeping the memorial in its existing location. Ian added that the Parish Council claimed that the current location was unsafe for the Armistice Day parade, however the Royal British Legion Remembrance Parade Policy Update advised that a parade was not the remembrance event, and it was not uncommon to have an event which did not involve a parade on a highway. Ian stated that St James' Church was fully accessible from the memorial hall car park via a direct footpath with no road to close or negotiate, presenting a viable and safe option. Ian commented that a survey from the Parish Council claimed 89 percent of respondents supported plans to relocate the war memorial, however it had been pointed out by others that in fact 90.1 percent of respondents were in objection to the proposals. Ian stated that the memorial was designated both as a war memorial and as a wayside cross, and to carry out its function as a wayside cross the monument was required to remain where it was currently situated. Ian commented that he had lived and worked in Finchampstead all of his life, and the monument was a historic icon of the village of which its location had been chosen by the village's forefathers. Ian asked that the monument be left in its current location, where he felt it belonged.

Graham Jukes, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Graham stated that the key issue relating to the application was the consideration of harm, and noted that the grade two listing applied only to the memorial itself and not to its setting. Graham stated that in the war memorial's current location the Parish Council's legal obligation to maintain the memorial could not be fulfilled, as the site was subjected to 11,000 vehicle movements each day. Graham stated that the site was too hazardous for contractors to operate without road closures, and after careful consideration of a range of options the Parish Council concluded that the only sustainable way for the Parish Council to continue to fulfil its legal obligations was to move the monument to a setting where it fulfilled its function as a place of respect and remembrance whilst allowing for careful maintenance for years to come. Graham stated that the original location had seen vast changes to traffic since the monument was placed there after the First World War, and careful checks had revealed no original debate over where the monument was to be situated. Graham added that the site was currently extremely dangerous for people to visit, was surrounded by heavy duty high curbed stones, and the Parish Council could no longer recruit contractors to carry out works on the monument due to health and safety concerns. Graham stated that following a consultation sent to all households, parishioners supported the relocation of the monument to a safer and more accessible location. Graham stated that the aim of the Parish Council was to maintain the memorial and re-establish its purpose as a purpose for accessible remembrance and quiet contemplation which was not possible at the current location. Graham accepted that there were some residents who

wished for the monument to remain at its current location for personal reasons, however he felt this was a minority of people, and asked the Committee to approve the application.

Rebecca Margetts stated that the proposal to relocate the war memorial was an emotive subject, and it was very important that any relocation decision was correct and allowed current and future residents to pay their respects. Rebecca added that the War Memorial Trust had recommended that the war memorial be kept at its current location with bollards and barriers installed to protect the memorial. Rebecca commented that she had concerns with the suggestion of bollards or barriers, and noted that the War Memorial Trust only recommended a war memorial to move where the current position would put the memorial at risk or where the location was inaccessible. Rebecca felt that both the inaccessibility and potential risk to the memorial were relevant for this war memorial, and added that any traffic calming could change the rural setting. Rebecca stated that there was only a pavement on one side of the road, and it was a great shame that the fantastic armistice service could not visit the war memorial in its current location and instead had to attend a poster of the memorial in a field. Rebecca felt that moving the memorial would future proof it, allowing future generations to pay their respects. Rebecca queried whether barriers were a possibility. Kieran Neumann, case officer, stated that barriers could possibly be achieved however they were not a part of this application.

Angus Ross commented that since he moved to the area in 1980 the traffic had significantly increased in this location. Angus added that he had never personally seen anyone visit the memorial due to its dangerous location, and felt that there was public benefit in moving the monument to a safer location to allow residents to visit and pay their respects.

Pauline Jorgensen stated that she was genuinely torn on this application, in part as the memorial's setting was formed from the overall setting and the view over the water. Pauline felt that this setting would have been selected by people directly affected by World War One, and she was very reluctant to see it moved to a more convenient location.

Chris Bowring queried what evidence was there with regards to how the current location was originally chosen. Kieran Neumann stated that there was not much specific evidence, and the only comments that could be found were in relation to the picturesque location and setting. Kieran added that on balance, the future proofing of the war memorial overrode the current setting of the war memorial.

Sam Akhtar sought clarity with regards to comments that there were two opposing consultation documents, with one showing overwhelming support for the relocation and another showing overwhelming objections. Kieran Neumann stated that the results of the consultation conducted by the Parish Council had no bearing on the scheme. Kieran added that this application was to consider the impact of moving the listed building itself.

Gary Cowan commented that the memorial cross was moved in Arborfield due to works on the roundabout, and very similar points were raised by the War Memorial Trust. Gary added that the project was carried out successfully, and the new location along the side of the roundabout allowed for benches to be installed which now attracted residents to be able to sit down and reflect. In relation to this application, Gary was of the opinion that whilst the current location was appealing it was not protected from the 11,000 daily vehicle movements, whilst any bollards or traffic lights would urbanise the area. Gary added that should the application be approved, the key was to reduce the risk to the fabric of the war memorial, and should it be left at its current location it was at risk of damage from road

vehicles. Should the war memorial be moved, Gary commented that he would like to see a condition protecting the monument at its future location from damage by trees.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey commented that as one of the three veterans on the Committee she felt that the proposal was the best option as it would allow current and future residents to pay their respects in safety.

Stephen Conway commented that the conditions that pertained in 1920 no longer existed, and added that the Parish Council now found it difficult to procure a maintenance team to take care of the memorial. Stephen commented that the current location was far from ideal for residents to visit and pay their respects.

Bill Soane stated that he was part of a group of people who raised funds to install a new war memorial in Woodley five years ago, which was sited within the Woodley memorial grounds. Bill added that this memorial now attracted between 200 and 250 people on Remembrance Day who could not attend before, whilst people often sat on the benches nearby to quietly reflect.

Marcia Head, Head of Development Management, stated that this application was to consider the planning merits of what harm would be caused to the building should it be relocated. Marcia stated that any considerations relating to protecting the monument from trees and roots, should it be relocated, would be considered under application number 213927.

RESOLVED That application number 213903 be approved, subject to conditions and informative as set out in agenda pages 38 to 39.

77. APPLICATION NO.213927 - FINCHAMPSTEAD MEMORIAL PARK, THE VILLAGE, RG40 4JU

Proposal: Full application for the proposed relocation and erection of war memorial, plinth and steps, creation of a footpath, installation of culvert and power supply.

Applicant: Mrs Katy Dagnall (Finchampstead Parish Council).

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 53 to 84.

The Committee were advised that the supplementary planning agenda included an update to paragraph 17 of the officer report. In addition to the supplementary planning agenda, the Committee were advised that additional comments and officer responses had been received in relation to this application and had been circulated to the Committee. An additional representation had also been received from the War Memorial Trust, and had been circulated to the Committee.

Ian Adnams, local resident, spoke in objection to the application. Ian stated that he was the vice-chairman of the Finchampstead Park Management Committee, and stated that the issue of removal of the hedge was still ongoing at meeting discussions. Ian was of the opinion that the Parish Council had made a decision despite opposition from residents, and added that he had spoken to many residents who did not like the suggested location for the relocation of the war memorial. Ian stated that the proposal would take the monument from one busy road and place it next to another busy road, which would offer no more opportunity for quiet contemplation than at its current location. Ian commented

that people in the village would prefer for the war memorial to be relocated at the church if it had to be moved, where there was adequate parking and amenities and available. Ian stated that the War Memorial Trust asked that anyone moving a war memorial should use a conservation accredited architect whereas the Parish Council had hired a landscape architect. Ian felt that the Parish Council should now go back to the village and seek their views as to their preferred location for the war memorial.

Graham Jukes, on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Graham stated that the hedge within the memorial park was not material to this application, however it would not be removed prior to full discussion and debate with the Finchampstead Park Management Committee. Graham commented that the consultation survey was circulated to 5,500 households, with 596 responses in total, and 89 percent agreed with the proposal to remove the memorial from its current site and relocate it to the verge adjacent to the memorial park of the village. Graham added that the memorial park was purchased in memoriam to those who fell in both World Wars, and felt that it was right and fitting that the memorial was located and maintained at this site. Graham stated that each year residents gathered at the park in front of a photograph of the memorial statue. Graham added that detailed plans were considered for four separate locations including the church, and following discussions the proposed location was deemed the most suitable given the guidance from the War Memorial Trust relating to the visibility of war memorials. Graham stated that an arboreal expert had been involved to both protect the monument and the plants and trees at the proposed location. Graham added that the proposed location would allow visibility of the memorial from those passing on the road, a safe space for those who wish to visit the memorial, and a safe venue for the remembrance service to take place each year. Graham asked that the application be approved.

Chris Bowring sought clarification with regards to the type and qualifications of the architect which would be carrying out this work, and was required by condition. Marcia Head, Head of Development Management, stated that the contract would ensure the landowner in the proposed location agreed to the erection of the structure on their land, which was a highway verge, prior to removal from the current location. Marcia added that condition attached to the agreed listed building consent included a requirement of provision of methodology detailing how the structure was to be transported, including a detailed schedule.

Rebecca Margetts queried whether a condition managing overhanging trees and tree roots from damaging the war memorial at the proposed location was included within the scheme. Marcia Head suggested that an additional informative could be added to in relation to this. Rebecca Margetts proposed an additional informative requesting that details be submitted including the provision for access to maintain the memorial in the new location including the ability to carry out future tree works should they be required. This was seconded by Gary Cowan, carried, and added to the list of informatives.

Stephen Conway commented that he appreciated that this was a delicate issue, however added that the Planning Committee needed to assess in planning terms whether the proposed location was acceptable. Stephen added that the parking located nearby would allow residents to visit the war memorial and pay their respects safely.

Chris Bowring sought clarification as to how policy TB24 might apply to this application. Kieran Neumann, case officer, confirmed that this policy applied to this application, as if the structure fell into disrepair Wokingham Borough Council would be responsible for its maintenance. Marcia Head stated that one of the conditions attached to the Listed Building

consent required a very detailed scheme showing how the structure would be transported and cared for prior to its removal.

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey proposed an additional informative, suggesting that the applicant provide a bench to allow people to rest and contemplate near the proposed site of the war memorial. This was seconded, carried, and added to the list of informatives.

Pauline Jorgensen queried what would happen to the previous application relating to listed building consent should this application be refused. Marcia Head stated that the listed building consent required a contract showing that the war memorial could be re-erected. Marcia added that the applicant could submit a further application detailing an alternative location.

Angus Ross queried whether the addition of the informative relating to a bench was reasonable as the bench would be located outside of the red line area. Marcia Head confirmed that both the Parish and Borough Councils had permitted development rights to place benches.

Angus Ross commented that although the proposed location would be located next to a busy road, it would not be as busy as the roads it was currently positioned next to. Angus felt that the condition relating to protection of trees and protection and maintenance of the war memorial were sufficient.

Gary Cowan commented that people sat on the benches next to the Arborfield memorial cross and reflected despite this being located next to a five exit roundabout. Gary added that a qualified firm had to be procured and used to carry out the works in Arborfield, and a similar qualified firm would also be required to carry out the proposed works.

Ian Adnams commented that the local car park was a privately owned car park.

Pauline Jorgensen was of the opinion that the war memorial in Woodley was fundamentally different, as it was a brand new memorial and did not involve moving an existing war memorial.

RESOLVED That application number 213927 be approved, subject to conditions and informative as set out in agenda pages 54 to 55, and additional informatives relating to maintenance and protection of the memorial in relation to trees and the suggested provision of a bench to allow for quiet reflection.

78. APPLICATION NO.213380 - BALCOMBE NURSERIES, BASINGSTOKE ROAD, SWALLOWFIELD, RG7 1PY

Proposal: Full application for the erection of 5 no. detached dwellings, two with detached garages and three with internal garages and associated landscaping works including one balancing pond, 2 no. accesses with entrance gates and 1.2m post and rail fencing.

Applicant: Woodridge Developments, 11 Arkwright Road Reading RG2 0LU

The Committee considered a report about this application, set out in agenda pages 85 to 120.

The Committee were advised that there were no updates contained within the supplementary planning agenda.

John Anderson, Swallowfield Parish Council, spoke in objection to the application. John stated that three-storey homes were not part of the character of the Parish, and the proposals would occupy an elevated position whilst taking centre stage within the wide site entrance. John added that the proposals would give the appearance of tall town houses within a field. John felt that the proposals were inappropriate within a countryside setting. John stated outline permission was granted in 2016 for three houses, which the Parish Council had supported on balance as an alternative to a busy garden centre. John stated that this permission had removed permitted development rights, however this had been subsequently ignored and the proposals were now for 5 tall dwellings with a separate driveway leading to plot one. John was of the opinion that this was a further attempt to increase the size and scope of the development, which would further harm the character of the area and was a step too far.

Lisa Burns-Peake, resident, spoke in objection to the application. Lisa stated that loss of privacy to her home as a result of the proposals would have a huge impact on their quality of life. Lisa was of the opinion that the proposed dwellings were utterly out of keeping with the housing stock on the road, and added that there had been subsequent increases in the proposed size of the development of the site since 2016.

Tristan Parsons, neighbour and on behalf of the applicant, spoke in support of the application. Tristan stated that he lived in the property two doors down from the site, and five years ago there had been an issue with travellers accessing the site and entering his back garden. As a result, the site was purchased with a view to develop. Tristan stated that he was now working from home alongside his wife whilst their children took part in home schooling when required due to Covid-19. Tristan stated that his family would be moving into plot one, and the proposed attic rooms would be added to the other four properties to allow those families space for home working. Tristan stated that many different designs had been considered, and the proposed designs were deemed to have the least impact on the countryside whilst providing space for the attic rooms without losing the attractive curve appeal of the properties, without increasing either the height of the dwellings or the footprint of the properties. Tristan felt the addition of the attics would allow for future families to work from home when required, which could also result in less vehicle movements to and from the properties. Tristan added that the additional floor space would attract an approximate £100,000 in additional CIL contributions to the Council.

Stuart Munro, Ward Member, spoke in objection of the application. Stuart stated that he understood the need for home working space, however the proposed dwellings would be very large via their existing and approved plans. Stuart added that the site had a long and complex planning history, and in his opinion it had reached the point where the proposals were no longer in keeping with the character of the area.

Stephen Conway stated that he fully understood the concerns of the Parish Council and local residents, however the principle of development had been established through previous planning permissions. Stephen commented that it was regrettable that there would be no housing mix on the site, other than four large houses and one very large house. Stephen sought additional details with regards to any potential issues relating to overlooking. Senjuti Manna, case officer, stated that the distance between the old cottage and plot one was approximately 80 metres, which was significantly more than was recommended within the Borough Design Guide, whilst trees would also provide additional screening. Senjuti added that it was accepted that this was a rural setting, however the proposals allowed for more than double the recommended separation distance.

Lisa Burns-Peake commented that plot one would be located directly behind her home and would be an invasion of their privacy with direct views into their garden and bedroom.

Angus Ross stated that the site had a long and complex planning history. Angus stated that the question for the Committee was whether it was reasonable to refuse this application when there was no proposed increase in ridge height or footprint, and sought officer comment on the viability of such a refusal should it go to appeal. Marcia Head, Head of Development Management, stated that the proposed changes were the inclusion of dormers and roof light windows, with no increase to the ridge height or footprint of any of the properties. Marcia confirmed that the separation distances were double that of the recommended distances.

Gary Cowan felt that the changes to the existing planning permission were minor, and Wokingham Borough Council would likely not fare well at an appeal. Gary commented that the site was 2.32 hectares, and in another location up to 70 houses could be placed on such a site.

RESOLVED That application number 213380 be approved, subject to conditions and informatives as set out in agenda pages 86 to 91.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD
HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 5.00 PM TO 6.50 PM**

Present

Charles Margetts	Wokingham Borough Council
Debbie Milligan	NHS Berkshire West CGC
Philip Bell	Voluntary Sector
Tracy Daszkiewicz	Director Public Health - Berkshire West
Nick Fellows	Voluntary Sector
John Halsall	Wokingham Borough Council
David Hare	Wokingham Borough Council
Matt Pope	Director, Adult Social Care & Health
Katie Summers	Director of Operations, Berkshire West CCG
Helen Watson	Interim Director Children's Services
Jim Stockley	Healthwatch

Also Present:

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

Nikki Cartwright, Interim Director of Joint Commissioning, NHS Berkshire West CCG the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System

Catherine Mountford, Director of Governance at Oxfordshire CCG and governance development lead for BOB ICS.

Dr James Kent, Chief Executive Designate of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System,

23. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Graham Ebers, Councillor Graham Howe, Steve Moore and Susan Parsonage.

24. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 14 October 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

26. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

27. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

28. WELLBEING BOARD STEERING GROUP

Ingrid Slade, Consultant in Public Health, provided an update on the Wellbeing Board Steering group.

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

- Following the approval of the Wellbeing Strategy in Autumn 2021, the next step was the agreement of a governance structure around strategy into action.
- The Board was reminded of the Strategy's five overarching priorities and the underpinning Wokingham priorities beneath each of those.
- Action Groups and Partnership Boards would take the lead on specific priorities and would be reporting to the Wellbeing Board on what action they had taken.
- It was proposed that the health inequalities priorities become cross cutting in the Strategy. The Health Inequalities Action Group was currently on hold and the Group had asked that the integrated and cross cutting nature of health inequalities across all Action Groups be considered, and that there be a focus on health inequality for each of those groups.
- Ingrid Slade presented the intended structure. It was proposed that a new Steering Group be set up between the Wellbeing Board and eight delivery groups.
- The Steering Group would provide operational oversight of progress against action plans and to identify any exception reporting that required escalation to the Wellbeing Board.
- The Steering Group would meet bimonthly in place of the informal Wellbeing Boards. At each meeting four of the Action or Partnership Groups would report against a defined action plan, allowing performance and/or delivery risks to be raised or areas of best practice highlighted. This would enable the Steering Group to monitor performance, quality and progress made. The Steering Group would ensure the operational delivery of the Wokingham Strategy into Action.
- With regards to membership, it was proposed that it be the same as the Wellbeing Board membership or an appointed representative. In addition, a Primary Care Network Director member, health provider representatives (Royal Berkshire/Berkshire Healthcare), other service providers e.g MIND/Cranstoun, and a secondary Headteacher representative, would be sought.
- Katie Summers, Director of Place Partnerships, NHS Berkshire West CCG, questioned whether the Chairmen of the Action Groups would be members of the Steering Group and was advised that they would be reporting to the Steering Group but not members. Consideration was being given to the creation of an operational group for these Chairmen.
- With regards to the secondary Headteacher representative, Helen Watson, Interim Director Children's Services, indicated that the Borough Education Partnership had now been established and would be meeting shortly. She offered to seek a nomination from the Partnership for the Headteacher representative.
- Katie Summers offered to help source appropriate representatives from the Royal Berkshire and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trusts.
- With regards to the Primary Care Network Director representative, Ingrid Slade indicated that the Wokingham Integrated Partnership would be approached about a PCN representative.
- Councillor Margetts questioned when the Steering Group membership needed to be finalised and was informed that it was hoped that the Steering Group would meet for the first time in March. Whilst it was hoped all representatives would be in place by then, the membership may not be finalised until the May meeting.

RESOLVED: That the update on the Wellbeing Board Steering Group be noted.

29. WOKINGHAM INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP BETTER CARE FUND ANNUAL PLAN 2021/22 PRESENTATION

The Board received a presentation on the Wokingham Integrated Partnership (WIP) Better Care Fund Annual Plan 2021/22.

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

- NHS England had released the submission template in September, and the final version had been agreed on 16th November, following the agreement of the Chair of the Wellbeing Board. It was essentially a formalisation of the Plan and budget agreed earlier in the year.
- During the development of this annual return the Integration Team had liaised with colleagues from the CCG, BHFT, RBH and the other West of Berkshire Local Authorities. Overviews were shared with all the WIP partners at delivery group (operational managers) as well as Leadership Board (Senior managers).
- The return submitted to NHS England had been judged to be sound.
- All the minimum financial contributions had been met as had all of the national conditions.
- Some of the services currently funded by the Better Care Plan were highlighted.
- Lewis Willing, Head of Health and Social Care Integration, informed the Board of targets identified. The first, admission avoidance, was a change to the target around Non-Elective admissions. A target around Length of Stay had replaced the target around Delayed Transfers of Care.
- The unplanned hospitalisation for chronic ambulatory care sensitive conditions aimed to get to the heart of the work of the Better Care Fund, and ensured that the partnership was supporting people in the community who would not necessarily require hospitalisation.
- With regards to Length of Stay, the percentage of in-patients, resident in the area, who had been an inpatient in an acute hospital for: i) 14 days or more ii) 21 days or more as a percentage of all inpatient, was monitored.
- The targets were very challenging but achievable. NHS England were keen to keep levels of performance high, especially as during the pandemic, unplanned hospitalisations and length of stay were very low. As such, they had pressed to ensure that targets were challenging.
- Other targets around discharge to normal place of residence, residential admissions and reablement, were highlighted.
- Due to Covid, the performance was very good against the long-term placements piece. Fewer placements than in a normal year were being made, and the Partnership had challenged itself to drop from 12 placements per month to 9.6 placements.
- Each local authority was required to complete a narrative plan.
- It was noted that Housing would become more involved in the discharge process.
- Councillor Hare questioned how it was ensured that patients were being discharged at the right time. Lewis Willing referred to the targets of keeping people in hospital no longer than 14 and 21 days so that they did not become 'stranded' or 'super stranded' in hospital, and the target that people were still at home 91 days after having been released from hospital. The Reablement team helped people to stay independent in the community.

- Councillor Hare noted that the 91 day target was the 'Proportion of older people (65 and over) who were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement / rehabilitation services'. He commented that sometimes those under 65 also required additional support to recover. Lewis Willing stated that the Better Care Fund was aimed primarily at supporting older people but people of all ages would be supported as required. Colleagues in Adult Social Care had regular discussions with the Royal Berkshire Hospital to ensure that discharge was being undertaken correctly.
- Katie Summers emphasised that there were several meetings a week to review those individuals who were classed as medically fit for discharge. The UEC Board also actively monitored readmissions rates to understand and respond to any issues identified.
- Katie Summers thanked Lewis Willing for the hard work that he had put into designing the Plan at short notice.
- The guidance suggested a need to have a focus on Covid recovery in the 2022/23 plans.
- Martin Sloan, Assistant Director Adult Social Care Transformation, and Integration, emphasised that the Royal Berkshire hospital regularly checked their readmission rates for 'failed discharges.' In addition, the social work team, whenever they were supporting a discharge and the person was readmitted, would log this with RBH. RBH would then review the patient to ascertain the learning required to reduce readmissions.
- Dr Milligan commented that Dr James Kent was undertaking a piece of work around early discharge. During Covid there was a big push to discharge patients as quickly as possible, but this had not always been possible if there had not been enough carers in the community. When people were released from hospital even one or two days early, they might require double up care, which was sometimes difficult to find. Even though the national team were requiring specific standards, consideration had to be given at a local level to ensure that residents received the best outcomes and that the care they required was available.

RESOLVED: That the presentation on the Wokingham Integrated Partnership (WIP) Better Care Fund Annual Plan 2021/22 be noted.

30. DEVELOPING OUR INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEM DISCUSSION WITH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH WELLBEING BOARD PRESENTATION

This item was considered as the final item on the agenda. A 15-minute adjournment was held to enable presenters to be able to attend the meeting virtually.

The Board received a presentation on Developing our Integrated Care System (ICS) from Catherine Mountford, Director of Governance at Oxfordshire CCG and governance development lead for BOB ICS.

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

- Conversations around the development of the ICS were still at early stages. The input of all partners into the development was sought.
- The change in structure was based on the Health and Social Care Bill which was progressing through parliament. Amendments were being proposed at the various stages, so the final position was not yet fully known.
- Statutory status had been put back from 1 April 2022 to 1 July 2022. However, the System would take 12-18 months to evolve and to be fully functioning.

- The forthcoming structure had been built on several years of discussion from the NHS Long Term Plan and the commitment to needing to work more in collaboration and with integrated services.
- The four goals of the ICS were:
 - improve outcomes in population health and healthcare;
 - tackle inequalities in outcomes, experience, and access;
 - enhance productivity and value for money;
 - help the NHS support broader social and economic development
- Catherine Mountford outlined some of the key terminology:
 - Integrated Care System (ICS) – the whole System across Berkshire West, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, including local authorities, provider Trusts, Healthwatches, practices and the Primary Care Networks.
 - Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) – joint committee with local authority partners.
 - Integrated Care Board (ICB) – NHS statutory body within the System.
 - Place Based Partnerships – local working though partnerships based at a Place level.
- From July 2022, the CCGs would no longer exist, and the CCG staff would TUPE across into the ICB.
- The System was made up of three Places (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West). Unlike some other South East ICS' there was not a single point of focus.
- The overall System would create strategy and delegation, whilst most care would continue to be managed and delivered at Place level. Place would manage pooled budgets and deliver on Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC), Long Term Conditions (LTC) and integrated care. Localities would deliver on inequalities. Consideration would need to be given on how Provider collaboratives would deliver services beyond a specific Place.
- The NHS wanted to work with partners to evolve the System and Place, and to discuss where it would add most value for integration and delivery to be at a local level and where it would best add value to work at a wider System level.
- The Unified Executive in Berkshire West already brought together partners who were delivering on integrated care. This would evolve in to the Place Based Partnership for the ICS, and could be a subcommittee of the ICB, meaning that authority and autonomy could be delegated to that committee, enabling it to take many of the decisions that were currently in the CCG's remit.
- The ICB Place teams would support the Place Based Partnerships.
- The Board noted a high-level overview of the parallels between Place working and System working. The Health and Wellbeing Boards in the Places would link into the ICP at System level, and the Place Based Partnerships would link into the ICB. In Place there would be scrutiny via the established Overview and Scrutiny Committees and where appropriate the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Board noted the minimum ICB membership as set out in the Bill (membership of 10).
 - 1 x Chair – (designate) Javed Khan
 - 2 x Independent Non-Executive Directors
 - 1 x Chief Executive of Integrated Care Board – (designate) Dr James Kent
 - 3 x Partner Members – brings sector expertise
 - 1 x Local Authority Officer (from authority which delivers social care)
 - 1 x Primary Care
 - 1 x NHS Provider
 - 1 x Finance Director

- 1 x Medical Director
- 1 x Nursing Director
- Helen Watson commented that in other areas of the country, separate Boards were being established to ensure that children and young people's needs were central. She questioned whether something similar had been considered for BOB. Catherine Mountford commented that there may be separate Children's Boards at Place level.
- Tracy Daszkiewicz, Director Public Health, asked whether it was likely to be a partnership of equals. Catherine Mountford commented that the ICS and all the elements within it would be a partnership. The ICB would be a statutory NHS body but would be set up in a different way. Having partnership members on the Board would broaden and strengthen discussion.
- Tracy Daszkiewicz went on to ask about the position of prevention, particularly primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention, and the influence and role of Public Health in that. With regards to Place, the focus on prevention and reducing health inequalities was where joint working needed to be strengthened with local authority partners to drive and deliver. Further consideration needed to be given to ways of working.
- In response to a question from Councillor Cunnington, Catherine Mountford explained her role within the establishment of the ICS.
- Councillor Cunnington questioned why there was only one local authority representative on the ICB, and how the voice of Wokingham residents would be heard. Catherine Mountford emphasised that the representatives would come with sector expertise rather than be representatives of a particular local authority. She emphasised the importance of Place. The ICB would have the ability to delegate to Place level and work with the three Berkshire West local authorities to ensure that the different population needs were met. In terms of the Board membership, conversations would need to be ongoing around maintaining a balanced membership between partner members, Executives and Non-Executives sectors' geographies, without the ICB becoming too large and unwieldy.
- Councillor Cunnington questioned whether there would be any change to Wokingham's Better Care governance, which had been very successful, and was informed that pooled budgets would likely be governed and run locally, as they were now.
- Councillor Hare expressed concern that local issues would be lost. He emphasised that West Berkshire and Reading had different outcomes to Wokingham, yet they were considered one Place. Catherine Mountford commented that there was a need to work at the appropriate geographical level.
- Nick Fellows, Voluntary Sector asked how the Voluntary Sector could get more integrated into the planning, have its voice heard, and bring to bear what it had to offer. Catherine Mountford emphasised that she would expect broad Voluntary Sector input into the ICP. There would be a workshop with the Voluntary and Community Alliance about working with the Voluntary Sector.
- Councillor Margetts referred to an issue with a particular surgery in the Borough. He questioned how Wokingham could ensure that local issues were addressed. A Place Director would cover the whole of Berkshire West. Catherine Mountford agreed to take this question around operational delivery back for a response.
- Councillor Margetts commented that the forthcoming structure was a big change and a lot of effort had obviously gone into the planning. He sought a commitment that ICS members would come to the Wellbeing Board in future for constructive discussions, to ensure the needs of Wokingham residents were represented. Catherine Mountford agreed that they would. The ICS would be actively reviewing

the way in which it was set up. As a new organisation, not everything would be right immediately.

- Councillor Halsall believed the new structure was remote, and that authority would appear to be taken away from local authorities. Catherine Mountford commented that what made sense to be commissioned at a local level would not be taken away to a higher level.
- Councillor Halsall commented that he was alarmed at the development of the new structure. Wokingham had had considerable success with integration, locally and he was concerned that this positive momentum would be curtailed. He went on to comment that he had not had any contact with the Chief Executive Designate. Councillor Halsall was of the view that there should be representation from each of the five local authorities on the ICB. Catherine Mountford emphasised that the ICS was still under development. Dr James Kent, Chief Executive Designate of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System, stated that they were trying to design a system which was based on parameters set out in legislation going currently through Parliament, and with a set of guidance on how to do that. He reiterated that the aim was to create Place Based Partnerships which would have most of the delegated funding. There was some flex into how these Place Based Partnerships were arranged, so a dialogue on good representation across all the local authorities in Berkshire West and how this would work, and how these partnerships would be given oversight by the Wellbeing Boards, would need to take place.
- With regards to the single local authority partner member on the ICB, Dr Kent emphasised that they were effectively a Non-Executive Director on the Board with expertise in that particular subject area, rather than representing a particular local authority. This was the same for the Primary Care and NHS Provider representatives. Dr Kent indicated that he understood concerns, but the intention was to build the system within the statute and the guidance, but also within each Place, to create a partnership that could take the majority of decisions over funding.
- Councillor Halsall stated that statute listed a minimum representation but not a maximum. Dr Kent stressed the need for an effective and manageable Board. If the Board increased in one area it would come under pressure to increase in other areas.
- Councillor Halsall sought assurance that GP disparity locally, was being addressed. Dr Kent explained that primary care were independent contractors operating through a GMS contract, a national contract negotiated through NHS England and the BMA. He indicated that he was happy to go through any issues identified with practices in Wokingham. With regards to the specific practice, they had been given additional funding via the Winter Access Fund, to try and make improvements. The Local Medical Council could also be contacted.

Councillor Margetts provided the following statement:

Thank you for your update. I wanted to read out a statement to record formally the view of the Wokingham Borough Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board with regards to the ICS and its formation. I have consulted key members of the Health and Wellbeing Board who deal with healthcare and Opposition politicians, and all are agreed on these comments.

We acknowledge the change in the NHS structure is a national directive and not up for negotiation, however we wish to state our concerns that the new structure as proposed is flawed, and we have concerns that the voice of the residents of Wokingham via

representation in the Health and Wellbeing Board, Wokingham Borough Council, and local GP Practices, will be diminished or silenced.

Our understanding of the Central Government legislation, which has been confirmed tonight by Catherine, is that as much as possible in terms of healthcare should be passed to 'Place' to ensure that decisions are made locally.

The three local authorities in Berkshire West 'Place' have some specific different population needs. They reflect the way communities are organised and are the boundaries within which social care are delivered, and therefore we believe that 'Place' would be better defined along local authority boundaries so that concerns on any particular subject within one local authority are not compromised by the specific needs of another.

On this Board our role is to represent the best interests of our Wokingham residents and we believe that they would be much better served by closer integration of health and social care within a Wokingham footprint.

We have an active Health and Wellbeing Board and Integration Board which works effectively. It is our belief that these structures should coordinate directly with the future Place representative of the ICB and should represent the views of the Wokingham community. We believe that these structures should be strengthened and developed rather than eroded by 'integration' across the Berkshire West footprint.

We have concerns, which have been expressed tonight, about the lack of representation for the local authority and local primary care within the ICB structures, resulting in a lack of local voices in the decision-making areas. Another point which has been touched on tonight - We note that one Chief Executive from one of the five authorities will sit on the ICP Board. I note the comments that you both made about this being a NED, but they will be in a position where they will be asked to give advice and opinions on things happening in the area, and we cannot understand how for example, the leader of Oxfordshire Council, can have any knowledge of Wokingham, West Berkshire, Buckinghamshire issues. We fear that this will lead to decisions being made with no accountability and minimal local voice, which in the end results in poor outcomes for our residents.

We note the intended recruitment of a Place Director for Berkshire West. Our concern is that they will have a Berkshire West view and will not understand the requirement to allow innovation within the Wokingham footprint to support our population with their needs, which may be and will be different from those in other parts of Berkshire West. This candidate should therefore be proactive in understanding the needs of the population of the Wokingham locality, and working with us to push them forwards.

We regret that we have to make this kind of statement, as we wish to have a constructive relationship with, and work in partnership with the NHS. However, we do believe that the current approach is flawed. Wokingham health and social care have always tried to work collaboratively and successfully with local NHS providers and Wokingham Borough Council. The Covid pandemic accelerated some of this joined up approach, and we do not wish to see this eroded with the lack of the strong Wokingham voice in the ICB.

We wish to formally record that this is our view that Wokingham should have its own Place based partnership in the new structure. Our motivation is not to cause unnecessary arguments or conflicts but simply to seek the the best health care possible for our residents, and we would ask that the ICS and the CCG listen to our comments, respond to

our concerns, and adopt the plan to reflect our wishes. We would be happy to engage in constructive discussions to try and move this forwards.

RESOLVED: That the presentation on developing our Integrated Care System, be noted.

31. REFRESH OF THE BERKSHIRE WEST LOCAL TRANSFORMATION PLAN, IMPROVING THE RESPONSE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLES EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Nikki Cartwright, Interim Director of Joint Commissioning, NHS Berkshire West CCG, presented the refresh of the Berkshire West Local Transformation Plan, improving the response to Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health.

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

- The refresh had been published in September 2021. The document built on the 2019 plan and provided an update on what had been achieved so far; local need, trends and the voice of children and young people and the parent/carer; the commitment to understand that further work was required; and resources required.
- The goal overall was to reduce the number of children and young people and their families whose needs escalate and require specialist intervention, a crisis response, or an inpatient admission.
- The Transformation Plan had been refreshed in line with the requirements of the NHS 10 year Long Term Plan.
- Nikki Cartwright outlined what the successful delivery of the plan would look like, including that good emotional health and wellbeing would be promoted from the earliest age and that poor mental health was prevented wherever possible, and that children and young people were as emotionally resilient as possible.
- The Board noted the refreshed transformational priorities, including building a formal delivery partnership arrangement, and tackling waiting lists in both specialist and core CAMHS.
- During Covid an increase in eating disorders had been seen, which put pressure on services.
- Two further Mental Health Support Teams were being mobilised.
- The Board noted the project updates.
- Councillor Margetts requested that the presentation slides be circulated to the Board.
- Matt Pope, Director of Adult Services, commented that children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing was one of the priorities within the Strategy into Action Wellbeing Plan and that there was an action plan and governance attached to this. He questioned how the action plans and governances were working together or whether further discussion was required on the matter.
- Helen Watson indicated that the Children and Young People's Partnership would welcome the presentation. She welcomed the breadth and depth of the work undertaken. Helen Watson went on to question whether the Transformation Plan would have sufficient coverage to tackle the increased demand resulting from Covid. Nikki Cartwright stated, along with the local authorities, increased capacity had been put in place around Kooth and eating disorders. There was an eating disorders recovery plan in place which did address the impact of Covid. She emphasised the need for continued monitoring and partnership working.

RESOLVED: That the refresh of the Berkshire West Local Transformation Plan, improving the response to Children and Young People’s Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health, be noted.

32. ICP UNIFIED EXECUTIVE

The Board received the ICP Unified Executive report.

During the discussion of this the following points were made:

- The ICP Unified Executive had met that day. However, the Chair’s report contained within the agenda had been carried over from December’s meeting.
- Matt Pope highlighted the ICP priorities for 2022/23. A lot of work had been undertaken to align those priorities across Berkshire West with priorities in the Strategy into Action Plan and the Wokingham Integrated Partnership.

RESOLVED: That the ICP Unified Executive report be noted.

33. FORWARD PROGRAMME

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

RESOLVED: That the forward programme for the remainder of the municipal year be noted.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 17 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 5.30 PM TO 6.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

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

Other Councillors Present Virtually

Graham Howe, Children's Services
Gary Cowan
Jim Frewin

97. APOLOGIES

Councillor Graham Howe was unable to be present in person at the meeting but attended remotely.

98. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 27 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Leader of Council.

99. 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;
- Councillor Charles Margetts on the grounds that he was a Non-Executive Director of Optalis Ltd;
- Councillors John Kaiser, Stuart Munro and Wayne Smith on the grounds that they were Non-Executive Directors of WBC Holdings Ltd.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen declared a person interest in Agenda Item 104 Commercial Waste and Recycling Contract on the grounds that her husband worked for a company that might bid for the contract. Councillor Jorgensen remained in the Chamber during the debate and voted on the item.

100. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

It is seventy years this month that King George passed away, leaving the throne to the Queen and I am sure that you will join me in thanking her for her service and to share her hope that the jubilee will provide an opportunity for people to come together after the difficulties of recent years. In recognition of the Jubilee, we will be providing free residential street closures.

It is now almost two years since Covid entered the Borough for the first time. The first case was on February 29th, 2020. 351 deaths have been recorded. I would just like a moment's silence to commemorate all those who have tragically died and those whose lives have been impaired in the Borough and elsewhere. All our thoughts are with them.

In the last month we have seen cases of the new Omicron variant in Wokingham reach new heights but also begin to decline. The current rate of new Covid cases is 917 per 100,000. The current rate reflects the week 2-9 February although we must be cautious to remember that these case numbers are reliant on the testing behaviour underlying them. The majority of cases remain within our school age population and their parents.

The past month has seen a shift in tone from central Government, looking to a future where we learn to live with Covid as an endemic disease. The detail around what this future endemic response will be released on Monday and our Officers will continue to work to communicate any new guidance and information to our residents, through the Community Champion newsletter, via our website and other channels, and also support our partners and providers working with care settings and educational settings as they navigate the transition into an endemic landscape. As we await to hear the detail from central Government we must note that the guidance has not yet changed, we have therefore to encourage people to continue to test when they have Covid symptoms and isolate where appropriate.

A cornerstone of the endemic response to Covid is to encourage as many residents as possible to get vaccinated, be it their 1st, 2nd or 3rd booster vaccine. I am delighted to announce that from Friday 18th February we will have a local vaccine provision in Wokingham Central Library open weekly on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with opening hours to suit our busy residents. All residents who are eligible, including importantly 12-15 year olds, pregnant ladies and those not registered with a GP, can walk up to the library and receive their vaccine at a time convenient to them. I urge you to encourage everybody to use this vaccination centre.

As we try to understand and implement policy around what life with endemic Covid looks like it is important to remember that different people in our communities have had very different lived experiences over the past two years and therefore will be entering this period of transition with different perspectives. We need to continue to work together, to be patient and understanding within our communities, so that we can move forward and begin to recover from the pandemic all together.

I want to make it clear again that all this administration, my party and I are completely opposed to the loss of every blade of grass, tree, shrub, field or greenspace in the Borough. Once it's gone it's gone forever. The verdict of the Borough's "enough is enough" consultation was also clear that the residents of the Borough agree with our stance.

Pinewood has never been a site allocated for housing. It is a site for numerous valuable clubs and organisations. I have made it very clear that this is the case on numerous occasions. Some seem to ignore what the Council says and plough on with a narrative that it is not the case. Wokingham Without Parish Council has a long lease on the site at a peppercorn from the Borough. It is included in the local plan to permit their development to improve their facilities should they wish it and included in our recently published Leisure Strategy.

We must obey Government mandates, which require us to make provision for a Government determined number of houses.

We have the option to do nothing, which would mean that we have no plan and therefore no defence against speculative development. There is not a square inch of the Borough which has not been optioned by a developer who would seek to exercise that option by

claiming we have no plan or five-year land supply. The developer would be successful. I have no doubt that we would be faced with housing numbers several times those currently mandated. This is the option that the Lib Dem South Oxfordshire District Council took with the result I understand of many more houses and the original plan reimposed.

I have worked hard and successfully to ensure that our housing numbers were reduced from 1,635 to the current 789 and campaigned again successfully to oppose the planned changes to national planning policies. I will continue to press Government to make more changes and encourage our MPs, who are all critical of the housing numbers and planning policies to join me in so doing. I have been successful in the past and hope to be so in the future.

I am conscious that this is the start of a very long evening for most for which the main topic of discussion is the Medium Term Financial Plan and associated strategies and policies.

However, it would be wrong to embark on these topics without acknowledging the success of the Borough's economic regeneration, whether it be Wokingham Town Centre, the tech industry, the University or Shinfield studios. We can thank twenty years of solid stable administration, which has created and welcomed these opportunities.

This did not happen by accident but by the achievement of Officers and members throughout the twenty years of this administration. We have demonstrable resilience and financial probity.

We are continuously researching new opportunities as we are repositioning our approach to inward investment and business. We are very enthusiastic to support proposals for the Royal Berks to relocate some or all its services to the Borough, which would not only create economic opportunity but also be integral to our health and wellbeing strategies for all our residents.

As we view the changing landscape and adapt to it, one of the early and visible casualties is the bus network. It appears that passengers are not returning in sufficient quantities to make the current network viable. To support it we are having to increase the subsidy but can only do this in the medium term in its current form if passenger traffic does not return.

I am recommending this budget to the Council. A budget that contains substantial investment in vital services for the community and contains no cuts. It is safe and prudent and will ensure we continue to deliver the high quality services that the residents have come to expect and rely on.

101. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

102. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

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

Question

A number of videos and other communications have been recently released by Executive Members, aimed at relieving some of the concerns and anxiety residents have with

regards to the Local Plan update. One of the main resident concerns is the potential impact additional traffic might have on the local highway systems.

To help local Councillors assist in managing some of the residents' Local Plan anxieties will the Executive Member kindly provide access to the detail and cost of the traffic modelling analysis undertaken in reaching the Local Plan recommendations?

Answer

The Transport Assessment Report which represents the output of transport modelling undertaken to the various growth strategies to inform the latest Revised Growth Strategy Consultation is all available on our website. Once you have had a look at that, if you have any detailed questions, I am quite happy to work with the Strategic Transport Team and set up a meeting with them.

The work was part of a wider commission, however the associated costs with modelling and the preparation of the report were just over £50k.

Further transport assessment work will be commissioned and published as part of the local plan and as the plan moves forward into the next stages. But as I said earlier the Team would quite happily take you through that modelling either on-line or if you would come into Shute End.

Supplementary Question

The reason I asked that question was that I was invited to a briefing by the Reading University, with regard to the local plan Hall's Farm proposal.

I attended because I had been made aware of a previous briefing that had also taken place with non-elected representatives of the local Conservative Association. To ensure my independence I asked to be accompanied by a totally independent witness, which was kindly accepted. During this briefing the University discussed many things including the traffic modelling and they made a statement of costs which was well into six figures. I do not know how many of these briefings they had, or plan to hold, but if they are quoting, and they confirmed when I challenged a six figure cost and you are telling me it was £50k, then we need to stop that going out because a six figure cost is a lot more than £50k

Supplementary Answer

It absolutely is. If you could just let me know who you spoke to, who was at that meeting, and then I will follow it up with the people who are now running it from the Reading University side.

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

Question

In a recent article in the Bracknell News Councillor Wayne Smith, when questioned about a proposed site for 270 houses on Council owned land in Barkham explained: "We are required to assess all land promoted for development as part of the local plan process".

Councillor Wayne Smith also said "We are required to assess all land promoted for development as part of the local plan process" but he did add that "the Council wants a majority of new homes to be built in the so-called 'Hall Farm / Loddon Valley' major development in Arborfield" – a location where 2,200 homes could be built by 2037/38 which is the end of the plan period.

If the Council needs to build 2,200 houses to meet its housing needs in Hall Farm/Loddon Valley by 2038 yet their draft LPU consultation plan is to build 4,500+ houses at Hall Farm meaning many Wokingham residents in the South of the Borough will be forced to live in a building site up to the year 2057 or longer.

From today that is 35 years away. All on the banks of a river that has a history of flooding and under the shadow of a Category A dam at Bearwood Lakes in a climate emergency.

Why do you plan for 2,200 houses in the Local Plan update but consult on 4,500+ houses?

Answer

I know you know most of this because we are living with your Plan as we speak.

National policy requires strategic policies in local plans to look ahead over a minimum of 15 years from adoption. However, when larger scale developments form part of a strategy, policies should be set within a vision that looks further ahead to take into account the likely timescale. Government policy now refers to a 30-year vision.

Providing a long-term vision, which sets out a holistic vision for a new community, can only be the right approach. To take any other route would be significantly misleading because it would be building on, building on, building.

The Hall Farm / Loddon Valley Garden Village proposed in the Revised Growth Strategy Consultation, provides an opportunity to create a sustainable new community with 4,500 new homes alongside jobs and the creation designated with a regional park along the River Loddon Valley, which currently does not have public access.

Setting a long-term vision of the new garden community is the right thing to do. This not only provides transparency; but allows the Council and other stakeholders to plan infrastructure appropriately. Having only a partial or short-term vision, would require infrastructure to be designed and added on in an ad hoc fashion over time, risking the quality and sustainability of the place.

As you are aware, no new homes or jobs would be located within areas at risk of flooding, nor would development have an impact on the communities further downstream. The consideration of flooding has been a key consideration from the outset of the masterplanning analysis, with a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment also undertaken.

I hope that helps.

Supplementary Question

You will recognise that I do not quite agree with that.

In connection with the LPU consultation, referred to in my question, a resident of Arborfield wrote to Michael Gove MP, yourself, Councillor Halsall and Sir John Redwood on 6th December concerning the inconsistency between Michael Gove's evidence given to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on Monday 8th November and the approach being adopted by Wokingham Borough Council in respect of its strategic plan update. The Secretary of State did reply on 31st January and the resident e-mailed me again, also Councillor Halsall and yourself, on 2nd February. He did advise me that he received no reply or acknowledgement from either of you to both e-mails, although I did reply to both.

My question is as the resident raised his initial concerns to the Secretary of State during the Local Plan Update Consultation period, although the Secretary of State did not reply until 31st January, will you instruct the Local Plan Update Team to accept the reply from the Secretary of State as part of the submitted evidence to the Local Plan Update Consultation?

Supplementary Answer

There is no reason why we would not accept that. Also, Gary as a bill to that John has written to Mr Gove asking for a meeting. The letter that has been written is quite a detailed letter and we are waiting for a meeting with Mr Gove. So, it is not that we are ignoring any communication with the Secretary of State, quite the opposite. We want to meet him to discuss the various points we raised in our letter.

103. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2022/23

The Executive considered a report setting out the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2022/23.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report and highlighted that the Housing Revenue Account was a ring fenced fund that included all the Council's social housing assets. Councillor Kaiser went through the recommendations and advised that the increases to council house dwelling and garage rents were under inflation.

Councillor Kaiser highlighted the importance of social homes in the Borough, mainly because affordable homes were no longer affordable for people on the lowest incomes.

Councillor Kaiser further advised that over the last few years around 1,700 affordable homes had been built which had kept up with demand. Unfortunately, Covid accelerated the number of people who were homeless, and it was therefore intended to bring forward, in due course, other changes which would help in meeting homeless need in the Borough. To this end Councillor Kaiser stated that he would like to see adopted in the new Local Plan a 50% policy with a larger proportion of that turned into social homes.

RECOMMENDATION That Council be recommended to approve the following:

- 1) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2022/23 (Appendix A);
- 2) Council house dwelling rents be increased by up to 4.10% effective from 4 April 2022 in line with the Council's Rent Setting Policy that was approved by Executive on 25 November 2021;
- 3) garage rents to be increased by 3.80% effective from April 2022 in line with Council's general fees and charges;
- 4) Shared Equity Rents to be increased by 4.86% based on September RPI, effective from April 2022;
- 5) Tenant Service Charges to be set based on cost recovery;
- 6) the Housing Major Repairs (capital) programme for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix B;

- 7) Sheltered room guest charges for 2022/23 remain unchanged at £9.50 per night per room.

104. CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed Capital Programme and Strategy for 2022-2025.

During the Executive Member for Finance and Housing's introduction he highlighted that despite the challenges of Covid over the past two years, and being the lowest funded unitary authority per head of population in the country, the Council's finances were in good shape.

Councillor Kaiser drew the meeting's attention to the fact that the Chartered Institute of Public Finances, having looked at the Council's finances, had stated that Wokingham was among the best 20 unitary authorities in the country with regards to resilience in the Council's accounts.

Councillor Kaiser advised that no cuts to services were being proposed in the forthcoming budget and the Council would continue to invest in Children's Services by making an additional £1.4m available. Investments in Adult Social Care of £3.8m would be included in the budget to meet the growing demand of the Council's vulnerable population. A £1.7m increase in the Place and Growth budget was intended to improve the environment.

The Council's capital investment in the community over the next 3 years was intended to be £265m.

Councillor Kaiser also highlighted a number of other areas that the Council was focussing on which included continuing investment in climate change measures, delivering more homes at a social rent, the implications of adult social care reform, and the local settlement which was only for one year and the new Government funding methodology which would be designed in the context of the national levelling up agenda. All of these areas would have an impact on the Council's finances which were already facing considerable challenges and uncertainties going forward.

Councillor Margetts emphasised the threat of the Social Care Reform and advised that discussions had been held with West Berkshire and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Councils about the implications of the reforms and as a result a letter has been sent to the Secretary of State and it was intended to continue lobbying to raise the matter with as many people as possible in the hope of addressing the problems that were likely to arise.

RECOMMENDATION that Council be recommended to agree the following:

- 1) the Capital Strategy for 2022 - 2025 - Appendix A;
- 2) the three-year capital programme for 2022 - 2025 – Appendix B;
- 3) the draft vision for capital investment over the next five years - Appendix C;
- 4) the use of developer contribution funding (s106 and CIL) for capital projects as set out in Appendix D. Approval is sought up to the project budget.

105. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2022-2025.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing informed the meeting that the Council invested money in order to generate revenue to support Council services. Without these investments and the capital generated it would be difficult to provide some of the non-statutory services.

Councillor Halsall queried what the likely impact of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) change would be on the Capital Investment Programme? Councillor Kaiser provided further explanation of the MRP change and clarified that this would not have an impact on the town centre as the project was at the point where it was paying back on its interest and that would enable it to pay its MRP. It was noted that when the housing companies borrowed money from the Council this would be subject to MRP but the companies, unlike the Council, were able to take account of any depreciation in their accounts. Councillor Kaiser also mentioned the issues that may arise with forward funding of building projects.

In response to a query about general fund borrowing Councillor Kaiser confirmed that the Council's current net borrowing was approximately £170m.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A, be noted, including the following additional appendices;
 - Prudential Indicators (Appendix B)
 - Annual Investment Strategy 2022/23 (Appendix C)
 - Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy (Appendix D)
- 2) it be noted that the Audit Committee agreed the Treasury Management Strategy on 2 February 2022 and have recommended the report to Council;
- 3) it be noted that the cumulative financial impact on the Council of its borrowing activities equates to a net credit to the general fund for the taxpayer of £42.70 per band D equivalent at end of 2022/23 and noting this credit increases to £62.47 at the end of 2024/25.

106. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022-2025 INCLUDING REVENUE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2022/23

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Medium Term Financial Plan for 2022-2025, including the Revenue budget submission for 2022/23.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Finance and Housing highlighted the role of the Capital Programme on the Council's MTFP and some of the projects contained within it.

With regard to the building of an adult social care home Councillor Margetts stated that the potential financial cost to the Council if this was not built would be expensive placements, probably out of Borough, which would not only cost more but would necessitate residents having to travel out of Borough to visit members of their family.

RECOMMENDATION That:

- 1) Council be recommended to approve the Summary of Budget Movements (SOBM) (Appendix A);
- 2) the report of the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee relating to Scrutiny of the Budget Setting Process 2022-23 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022-2025 (as set out in Appendix B to the report), be noted;
- 3) the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix C to the report be approved, to be effective from the dates listed on the schedule;
- 4) it be noted that the MTFP, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Strategy and Treasury Strategy budget papers do not include any budget changes in relation to the Gorse Ride Redevelopment project. Any changes to this project agreed by Executive will be enacted by the Deputy Chief Executive across the MTFP, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Strategy and Treasury Strategy where appropriate;
- 5) authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and the Lead Member for Leisure, to approve reductions, discounts and/or promotions for fees and charges within sports and leisure, up to £100 per fee or charge.

107. COMMERCIAL WASTE AND RECYCLING CONTRACT

(Councillor Pauline Jorgensen declared a personal interest in this item)

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposal to renew the Commercial Waste and Recycling Contract which was due to expire on 31 July 2022.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing clarified that this contract did not relate to the disposal of household waste and recycling collected from people's homes but related to commercial waste that the Council generated from not only its corporate sites, but from its country parks, cemeteries, schools etc.

RECOMMENDATION: That the renewal of the Commercial Waste and Recycling Contract and for Procurement to advertise the opportunity and procure via a competitive tendering process be approved.

108. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2023/2024

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed School Admission Arrangements for 2023/24.

The Leader of Council advised that the Council had a statutory duty to determine admission arrangements for the 2023/2024 academic year by 28 February 2022.

The Executive Member for Children's Services confirmed that the Council had a duty to co-ordinate the admissions of children into Reception, Year 3, and Year 7. The Council did, however, provide a co-ordination service to other year groups and most schools opted into this service. Councillor Howe highlighted some of the key changes to school admission arrangements as set out in the report:

- Changing the deadline for providing evidence of house moves to 31st December, in order to align with neighbouring authorities;
- The Schools' Adjudicator had determined a reduction in the Published Admission Numbers (PAN) for Colleton 60 to 45, Radstock 60 to 45 and Loddon 90 to 60 Primary schools;
- Farley Hill School would increase their PAN to 60 and the designated area of the School would be increased to include two additional areas. Both of these changes would assist those who lived close by and who wished to attend the school.

Councillor Howe clarified that the Council only determined the admission arrangements for community schools and highlighted that with regard to secondary schools the only community school was Bulmershe. This meant that nine of the secondary schools and about half of the primary schools in the Borough determined their own admission policies.

RECOMMENDATION That:

- 1) the proposed Admission Arrangements for school admissions for the school year September 2023 to August 2024 be approved;
- 2) the final report be agreed for publication including incorporation of statutory changes and non-material amendments and updates as required to the published version;
- 3) authority be delegated to the Director of Childrens Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Childrens Services, to determine Admission Arrangements for school admissions, if there are no substantial changes to the arrangements, in future years;
- 4) it be noted that a further paper regarding place planning specifically, will be submitted to Executive as a separate report at a later date.

109. GORSE RIDE REGENERATION PROJECT CHANGES TO DELIVERY MODEL

The Executive considered a report relating to proposed changes to the delivery model for Gorse Ride Regeneration Project.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing went through the report and confirmed that the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project would provide more and better affordable homes. The Project recognised the value a thriving community can make to a successful housing regeneration project and to this end had worked collaborative with residents to ensure that the sense of community was preserved throughout the proactive engagement process.

Councillor Kaiser highlighted that the provision of well-planned and delivered affordable housing had never been more important. Homelessness was on the increase and increasing house prices in the Borough continued to make home ownership unaffordable for many. It was noted that the project was generally well supported by residents, who along with the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel, were updated on progress on a regular basis.

Councillor Kaiser reminded Members that in May 2018 the Executive approved the Gorse Ride Regeneration Project to replace the existing 178 poor quality, primarily Council owned social homes with 243 new high quality, well designed and energy efficient homes.

The current proposal was for a total of 249 new homes to be built, of which 136 would be socially rented, 49 shared ownership and 64 private sale homes. This was 51 more affordable housing properties than were currently provided on the old development. The new proposal was for the regenerated properties to be transferred to the HRA, rather than to Loddon Homes, which would allow access to the HRA borrowing capacity without the need for additional affordable housing contribution and enable access to the use of Right to Buy receipts as an additional funding scheme.

RECOMMENDATION that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve that the development of homes within the Gorse Ride regeneration will be transferred to the Housing Revenue Account. (With market sale element in the general fund)
- 2) approve the expenditure budget up to the total cost of the scheme of £105,601,534 funded through a combination of HRA borrowing, capital receipts, developer contributions and right to buy receipts. (Further information provided in the report);
- 3) give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Finance, to approve the use of additional Affordable Housing s106 commuted sums as a contingency against cost and funding variations such as any future design changes and/or fluctuations in costs and values of up to 15% of the cost of the scheme in the event of any other financial impacts;
- 4) agree that any appropriation of land between the HRA and general fund required to deliver the scheme will be delegated to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Finance.

110. LOCAL BUS SERVICES

The Executive considered a report relating to the provision of support to local bus services if required until clarity on future Government funding was known.

During the introduction the Executive Member for Planning and Transport advised that during Covid there had been a slump in bus usage which was not predicted to recover until at least 2023. As a result of low passenger numbers, the No 7 bus was withdrawn at very short notice by Reading Buses.

In addition, Councillor Jorgensen advised that there was currently no certainty on Government funding for buses post April. Therefore it was proposed to allocate money from S106 funding to bridge the gap, on the basis as set out in the report, to ensure that bus services were maintained in the short term until clarity over Government funding was known.

RECOMMENDATION that:

- 1) it be agreed to appropriate S106 funding being made available to support local bus services during 2022/23 for a short period of time, in accordance with details in Part 2 sheet;

- 2) authority to draw on the S106 funding as and when required be delegated to the Director of Place in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive/ Director of Resources and Assets and the Executive Members for Highways and Transport and Finance.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON 21 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.20 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Alison Swaddle (Chairman), Jackie Rance (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Michael Firmager, Adrian Mather, Tahir Maher, Barrie Patman and Rachel Bishop-Firth

Others Present

Phil Cunnington

Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

Martin Sloan, Assistant Director Adult Social Care Transformation and Integration

Niall Norbury, Campaigns and Marketing Manager, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Gill Valentine, Director Midwifery, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Sarah Philip, Lead Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Nicky Lloyd, Chief Finance Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

53. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Carl Doran.

Jenny Cheng attended the meeting virtually.

54. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

55. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

56. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

57. BERKSHIRE WEST - WINTER COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Niall Norbury, Campaigns and Marketing Manager, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust provided an update on the Berkshire West Winter Communication Plan. The presentation focused on what had been delivered in the campaign.

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

- When developing the Plan, a huge variety of groups had been consulted including different departments within the Trust, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, South Central Ambulance Service, the Berkshire West Healthwatches, Pharmacy Thames Valley and the local authorities.
- The Plan had 3 key messages:
 - Be prepared – reducing unnecessary pressure on the health system. The message focused on ensuring that people had stocked up medicine cabinets, were able to have conversations regarding mental health so that they did not become too isolated, and caring for vulnerable friends and family.
 - Choose the right service – ensuring that people knew which service to contact, making proper use of NHS 111, understanding the difference between urgent and emergency.

- See your GP differently – decreasing some public dissatisfaction around changes in primary care, particularly by highlighting the different roles that existed. Also, highlighting the benefits of alternatives to face to face appointments.
- Niall Norbury outlined what the campaign had delivered.
- A website had been built within the current Trust’s website which contained a lot of resources such as what you should have stocked in your medicine cabinet, and how to refer yourself to Talking Therapies, different roles in the GP surgeries, and where the Minor Injury Units were located.
- Bus campaign – this had been the first time that this had been run. The campaign was run in conjunction with Reading Buses, on 30 buses covering across Wokingham, West Berkshire, and Reading. This was particularly effective in reaching those who may not be reached via other means.
- Printed materials – Banners and leaflets across the sites and GP practices.
- Digital graphics – for use across social media, email signatures, website banners, digital screens, and other locations. Over 30 different graphics had been produced.
- Videos – 15 different videos on various topics.
- Social media – Content had been added to Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, NextDoor and Tik Tok. NextDoor had not been used before and had proved a good way of reaching the community. Paid campaigns had also been run ahead of Christmas to encourage prescription refilling.
- Events – a number of public facing events had been run including a live online Q&A targeted at Wokingham parents on managing common childhood illnesses. This had been very successful.
- Press and media – Coverage in Berkshire Live, Reading Chronicle, Wokingham Today and BBC Radio Berkshire. Not as much coverage as had been hoped for had been secured.
- Partner communications – working closely with the Communications Teams from partners such as the local authorities, PCN’s, CCG and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, to cascade key messages.
- A lot of data was still being collated. Focus Groups would be held next week to delve more into the information.
- Social media was easier to measure as an instrument of success. Initial findings suggested that Facebook in particular had been a good way of communicating with residents, receiving 169,282 impressions directly tied to the campaign. Twitter and NextDoor had also performed well. Instagram had performed less well, but the Trust was still growing its following on this platform.
- A survey had been conducted to gather qualitative feedback. People were asked if they recognised where imagery from the campaigns came from and where they had seen it, to gauge how familiar people were with the campaign. 35% had indicated that they were familiar with the imagery. This information would be used in future to see how information could best be delivered effectively.
- Areas which had been particularly successful had been those of very small focus such as encouraging people to sort out their repeat prescriptions prior to Christmas. These areas were where people could quickly take action, which lead to quick wins. It was harder to gauge the impact of areas of the campaign such as encouraging the current use of NHS 111 and knowing the difference between urgent and emergency. It was likely that this would become a year-round campaign and that future winter campaigns would focus on quick actions that people could take in winter time.
- A Member asked how successes would be measured. Niall Norbury commented that the data was still being collected but that one of the measures would be looking at the engagement that the Trust had had. For example, many of the social media impressions were directly tied to the pharmacy campaign. Work would be undertaken with the Pharmacy teams to establish whether they had experienced an increase in usage during the correlating time period.
- A Member questioned whether social media could be used more in other campaigns such as encouraging take up of the flu jab. Niall Norbury commented that this campaign had been an opportunity to see what did and did not work well. Social media had worked well

and was a creative way of getting various messages out. There would be a campaign about cancer referrals soon.

- In response to a Member question about how areas of the campaign that had been perceived as being less successful would be taken forwards, Niall Norbury commented that residents would be more involved in the process, checking the campaign materials prior to delivery.
- A Member questioned why press coverage had been less successful. Niall Norbury commented that the media wanted to know why the issue was newsworthy at that point in time. The few areas where the Trust had received coverage was when it had had something to announce or something big to push, such as abuse of staff, which had tied in with a national campaign. More work would need to be undertaken on making stories appear more newsworthy and tie in with the national picture.
- Niall Norbury emphasised that the core message was ensuring that people were winter ready.
- A Member asked whether the campaign had been particularly successful in specific geographic areas as opposed to others. Niall Norbury indicated that he could provide data relating to the paid campaigns.
- Members asked how those who were less tech savvy would be targeted. Niall Norbury commented that leaflets had been given out as people had accessed services. This was an area that the Trust could build on in future, using staff and stakeholders more as communication tools. The Trust would also broaden out the partners that it had worked with, communicating more with community groups
- Nicky Lloyd, Chief Finance Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, added that the Trust was keen to work with the Council and its contacts. The Trust had also reached out through faith leaders particularly during the vaccination campaign. In addition, it had been working with Access Able which was making sure that it was possible to navigate the Trust's services for different groups such as those with autism or who were sight impaired. They had fed back the need to continue to use traditional communication channels.
- A Member queried whether there could be a single interface across the whole of Berkshire West, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire. They went on to ask whether greater use could be made of AI replacing competitive components, particularly with regards to NHS 111. Niall Norbury commented that making websites as simple as possible to access was important. The Trust had carried out work the previous year to overhaul its website so as to make it more user friendly. For example, if you entered the term 'heart' it would bring up cardiology.
- A Member questioned whether the Trust had reached out to schools, Food banks and organisations such as First Days. Niall Norbury stated that they had not for this campaign, but that he felt that schools in particular were an area where the Trust could be more involved.
- The Committee asked what Councillors could do to help promote messages. Niall Norbury stated that it was important that organisations were providing the same message. Sarah Philip, Lead Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, emphasised that it was important to reinforce the message that the Covid vaccine was safe for pregnant women and their babies, as there had been a lot of misinformation available around this. Uptake had massively increased.
- In response to a Member question regarding feedback from GP practices on the success or otherwise of the Winter Ready campaign, Niall Norbury indicated that feedback had been received from some practices. What had been considered successful was the highlighting of the different roles within the GP practices.
- The Trust had not yet been able to deliver the publishing waiting times online project.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The update on the Berkshire West Winter Plan be noted;
- 2) Niall Norbury be thanked for his presentation.

58. MATERNITY SERVICES

The Committee received an update on maternity services provided by the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, from Gill Valentine, Director of Midwifery, and Sarah Philip, Lead Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust.

- In October 2020 Healthwatch had produced a report on Experiences of Perinatal Mental Health Support in Wokingham Borough. During the first wave of the pandemic there had been a lot of changes to maternity services and choices and access to services had been reduced.
- The report had been divided into three sections.
- The first section related to Care during pregnancy – choice and further support. Some women had felt that they had not received a choice around antenatal care, and had been steered into a particular course of action, which had had a negative impact on their perinatal mental health as a result.
- Women were provided with a choice of Antenatal care provider (RBH, Frimley or other. Midwife or consultant led care). There were some criteria where it would be suggested that women have consultant care. Women were offered a choice of where they had their baby (hospital, Midwifery Led Unit, or a homebirth. During the first wave of the pandemic the Midwifery Led Unit had been suspended as a choice because all staff had been moved to the delivery suite to cope with the anticipated increase in mothers with Covid who were in labour.
- Women could be referred to a consultant midwife if they wanted to have more individualised plans for care, particularly if they had a complex pregnancy previously.
- Personalised care planning was offered from the first antenatal appointment through to postnatal care, to try to individualise the care offered as much as possible.
- The second section of the report looked at birth experiences. Where women had not had the experience that they had wanted or expected, this had sometimes impacted negatively on their perinatal health.
- A Birth Reflection Service had been implemented in 2020 after a successful 12-month pilot. Women could be referred, or self-refer to the service, and could talk about their birth experiences and how it made them feel. As part of the service, a screen was carried out for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The Team worked closely with the Berkshire Birth Trauma Service to ensure that appropriate referrals were made. There was high demand for the Birth Reflection Service and feedback had been very positive.
- Themes sometimes emerged from the Birth Reflection Service which were fed back to the Intrapartum Strategy Group where service improvements were discussed and agreed. The Group worked with the Maternity Voices Partnership and other users.
- The third section of the report focused on Postnatal care and infant feeding. Lots of feedback had been received regarding post-natal care particularly hospital based. There was a focus on making improvements in this area. Initially during the pandemic no visiting was allowed and then it had been very restricted meaning that women had not been able to have partners with them, or later, on a time restricted basis, which had negatively impacted on postnatal birth experiences.
- Various service improvement plans were in place. Work was ongoing with the Maternity Voices Partnership to help prioritise where improvements were made.
- Post-natal care plans were integrated into patient's Electronic Records, and this included a psychological care plan.

- A 'Me and My Baby' app had been introduced which women could download before discharge and which contained helpful information such as about infant feeding.
- The Trust was working towards the UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation, standards around infant feeding. A Member asked for further information as to what this would entail.
- Sarah Philip provided an update on the unannounced CQC Inspection from 2019, the results of which had been published in January 2020. Overall, the service had been rated Good. However, there had been some key points under the safety domain which had been highlighted as Requires Improvement.
- Sarah Philip updated on the action taken to make improvements regarding safety.
 - The top challenge related to midwifery staffing – an Executive led midwifery recruitment and retention group had been established. With regards to recruitment, the Trust had been attending recruitment fayres, recruitment days and University Days. With regards to retention, consideration was being given to develop groups such as the Midwifery Support Workers. Staff surveys and exit interviews were looked at to understand the challenges that staff were facing. Midwifery was a very challenging environment and senior leaders were looking at more compassionate ways of working.
 - KPI's not meeting the Trust's minimum standards – joint senior midwifery and obstetric reviews were carried out where any KPI was red. Action plans were monitored through monthly governance meetings.
 - IT issues with data capture – shortly after the CQC visit a new Maternity IT system had been implemented in November 2020.
- Members were updated on staffing. A graph showing the number of staff in post, the average amount of staff who left (there was a rolling turnover of approximately 10%), proportion of staff on maternity leave and those returning from maternity leave, was noted. This information helped to project staff numbers. In January there had been 165 full time equivalents posts and it was projected to increase to 178 by August. The establishment was 183 so there would still be some vacancies. 10 full time equivalents would be starting by April and a further 8 by October. A lot of work had been undertaken on international recruitment which had been very successful. In addition, there was funding for another 9 full time equivalents from international recruitment.
- It was hoped that the work on retention would help to bring down turnover and the vacancy rates.
- The number of student trainees at the hospital had increased, and the Trust was now working with more than one university to provide clinical placements.
- At the end of September, the Executive Team had attended a Maternity Summit to support the senior clinical and operational teams to work on a plan to achieve an Outstanding CQC rating. Small teams had worked on each of the CQC domains to identify quality improvements, and feedback would be provided on 10 March.
- A Peer review had been undertaken with Frimley NHS Foundation Trust in November. Frimley had used the CQC framework and initial feedback had been largely positive.
- A Member asked about the number of Midwives expected for each shift and how often this was achieved. Gill Valentine indicated that it depended on the ward and department but that there were minimum staffing numbers for each. This was monitored on a shift-by-shift basis. When not up to full staffing, agency or bank staff were used. Resources were also quite flexible and there could be movement between the departments. There were clear escalation policies.
- In response to a Member question as to when a further CQC inspection was expected and how the Trust expected to perform, Gill Valentine indicated that an

inspection was expected imminently, which was part of the reason that Frimley had been asked to undertake a peer review, to help give confidence in some areas and identify where further work was needed elsewhere. The Trust had also undertaken a self-assessment against where it felt it was performing against the CQC standards. Realistically as staffing was still not where the Trust wanted it to be, Safety may still be considered Requires Improvement. Nicky Lloyd added that the Trust sought to provide a good, safe service at all times. The Team had managed the staffing rotas well during the pandemic despite some staff being off with Covid or having to isolate.

- Members asked about patients' mental health. Gill Valentine indicated that patients were asked some screening questions throughout the pregnancy which helped to assess their mental wellbeing. Those who had significant mental health issues or who were at risk of developing them, could be referred to a joint clinic with perinatal care and obstetrics, so a detailed plan could be put in place. Assessment continued in the post-natal period with psychological care plans which could be put in place. Work was also undertaken with GP colleagues.
- Members asked about international recruitment and were informed that the main success in recruitment had been in Africa. The Trust was working with an international recruitment agency to look at recruiting from other areas such as Dubai. There were not many midwives in Europe available currently. Other countries were also experiencing shortages and there were some countries that it was not possible to actively recruit in. Members were informed of the successful international recruitment programme, the Medical Training Initiative.
- Members went on to ask what the main barriers were to recruitment and whether they were local or national issues. Gill Valentine commented that there was a national shortage, hence the increase in clinical placements for students and the international recruitment campaign.
- A Member questioned whether the information on the My Baby App was available in other non-electronic formats and was informed that information was available in various forms and a range of different languages.
- In response to a Member question around attracting new trainees and whether a new and improved bursary would help in this area, Gill Valentine stated that a lot of work had been undertaken around apprenticeships to support staff going into Midwifery training. It was important that development opportunities were available to allow staff to have sufficient choices and training to enable them to determine which pathway they then followed. Sarah Philip added that training in obstetrics and gynaecology was tough and around 1 in 3 trainees in this speciality did not complete the training. More flexible working patterns were encouraged, and pursuing other interests, such as research.
- The Friends and Family Test was used to receive feedback on care received. Qualitative feedback was very useful as was the results of the national Maternity Survey.
- It was noted that NHS England had dropped the 20% limit for caesarean births. Members questioned what impact this would have on the Trust. Sarah Philip indicated that levels had been around 30% on the last dashboard. They welcomed the move away from the rigid target.
- A Member questioned whether Maternity facilities would be upgraded. Nicky Lloyd indicated that chillers in the unit had been upgraded and retrofit changes were being made to the Maternity block where possible.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The presentation on Maternity Services be noted;
- 2) Gill Valentine, Sarah Philip, and Nicky Lloyd, be thanked for their presentation.

59. HEALTH INTEGRATION

Martin Sloan, Assistant Director Adult Social Care Transformation, and Integration provided a presentation on health integration.

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

- Wokingham Integrated Partnership (WIP) was one of the partnerships that fed through to the Wellbeing Board. The Board had recently signed off a new Wellbeing Strategy which influenced a lot of the partnership's work.
- Members were reminded that WIP focused more on Adult Services and that there was a separate Board which focused on Children and young people.
- Since the last update to the Committee, there were now 5 Primary Care Networks and Voluntary Sector representation had increased.
- Each year the WIP agreed a work programme for the year in March/April. It was submitted to NHS England for approval. This year there had been 6 key priority areas:
 - Mental health and social inclusion;
 - Deconditioning/rehab/physical activity
 - Frailty monitoring;
 - Inequality and poverty;
 - Social prescription (including data and IT to support integrative work);
 - Better Care Fund monitoring and administration.
- These priorities had fed into 19 projects to support the partnership to integrate.
- The Integration Board looked at all the schemes in December and determined whether they should be continued, or the funds directed elsewhere.
- **Mental Health and Inclusion -**
 - Implement MIND service and establish Mental Health Alliance
 - ❖ the MIND service was now nearly at capacity.
 - ❖ Quarterly Mental Health Alliance meetings were now taking place to support the system to work together on mental health, and patients were reporting good outcomes.
 - Implement Friendship Alliance Phase 2 (including Look to increase Digital Inclusion for the most vulnerable in the community). There were 4 key organisations involved in the Friendship Alliance; Involve, Age UK, LINK visiting scheme and Wokingham Volunteer Centre -
 - ❖ Friendship Month had been a massive success with over 300 residents attending over 30 events, including Friendship Cafes.
 - ❖ Digital Devices had been issued to over 45 elderly people and their families. A mid-year review had resulted in a further 25 devices being made available.
- **Deconditioning/rehab/physical activity**
 - Reablement Review/Implementation
 - ❖ Members were informed of the Surrey Model, which ensured a greater focus on domiciliary care.
 - Moving with confidence – Sport and Leisure staff went into people's homes to help those who had become deconditioned following the pandemic, to provide a 1-2-1 service to help to get them more active again.
 - Leg Ulcer pilot – working with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust which had set up group clinics for leg ulcers. There had been a soft launch

- in November, and it had officially launched in January. Initial feedback was very positive.
- Reducing Hospital Pressure with Bed Based Services
 - ❖ Work had focused on the Oak Wing and there had been an increase in performance.
 - ❖ Some beds were also being used in Wokingham hospital for reablement.
 - **Frailty monitoring –**
 - Social Work Liaison Implementation-
 - ❖ Additional social workers had been appointed and assigned to two Primary Care Networks. A work plan had been developed for their start in March. There had been delays in recruitment due to the shortage of social workers.
 - Inequality and Poverty Analysis and Reporting (Population Health Management approach)
 - ❖ An analyst was now in post in the Public Health Team who would be supporting the creation of Primary Care Network profiles.
 - ❖ Support with the creation of Hong Kong Webinar to support new residents.
 - Social prescription (including data and IT to support integrative work)
 - Project Joy- The project had supported 2016 people in the Borough (January 2022), against a target of 1700 (national target for 1% of GP interactions should be Social Prescription).
 - Connected Care Review.
 - Creating Healthy Communities – This had been delayed by the pandemic. A workshop would soon be held in one of the Primary Care Networks, but further work would be needed to implement workshops in all of the Primary Care Networks.
 - Service User Experience- This had been placed on hold, as the CCG were looking to run a West of Berkshire solution
 - Social Prescription - Involve ran a forum for all the non-clinical staff in the Borough to help give a good, shared grounding across health and social care.
 - Virtual Group Clinics- 100% of attendees had advised that these had met their expectations and a second cohort was being run in February.
 - Martin Sloan outlined the monitoring arrangements around the Better Care Fund Plan. Wokingham's performance was best in Berkshire West and performing well against all national targets.
 - Martin Sloan clarified that where the presentation referred to projects being 'business as usual' this meant that it stopped being a project and would be continued as part of the services provided.
 - With regards to the inequality and poverty analysis work, a Member asked what was emerging from this work and how this would be taken forward. Martin Sloan indicated that it was early days, but profiles would be produced for each of the Primary Care Networks which would highlight priorities for their patients. He agreed to provide summaries of the non-confidential information.
 - It was confirmed that work was also being carried out to target those who did not access to technology.
 - Martin Sloan explained that the costs of the project were fed back into the Integration Board. The funding was separate to the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

- Members asked about lessons learned from Friendship Month and if there were plans to run the initiative again. Martin Sloan responded that funding was being put into the voluntary sector recurringly so that successful initiatives could continue.
- A Member question whether Wokingham would still have full control over the allocation of the Better Care Fund with the advent of the BOB ICS. Martin Sloan indicated that it would be challenging to keep a focus on Wokingham issues. They had been told that at present the Integration Board would be continuing and would have control of the Better Care Fund. Wokingham was advocating that it remained a Place Based Partnership and be formally recognised as that.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The presentation on health integration be noted;
- 2) Martin Sloan be thanked for his presentation.

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.56 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Pauline Helliard-Symons (Chairman), Alison Swaddle (Vice-Chairman), Sam Akhtar, Rachel Burgess, Paul Fishwick, Jim Frewin, Guy Grandison, Norman Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Rebecca Margetts, Jackie Rance and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Gregor Murray and Laura Blumenthal

Officers Present

Neil Carr, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Insight, Strategy and Inclusion
Jackie Whitney, Head of Customer Delivery

31. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

32. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The following Members made general personal declarations of interest:

- Rachel Burgess - as a member of the Anti-Poverty Working Group.
- Paul Fishwick - as his wife worked as a volunteer for Citizens' Advice.
- Jim Frewin – as a member of the Customer Excellence Programme Working Group.
- Sarah Kerr - as a volunteer at the Wokingham Foodbank.
- Alison Swaddle - as a member of the Anti-Poverty Working Group.

34. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

35. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

36. ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY 2022-26

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 17 to 44, which gave details of the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2022/26. The report stated that the Anti-Poverty Strategy aimed to prevent people falling in to poverty, offer support to those already in poverty and help those in poverty to get out of it. Through working in partnership it aimed to develop an early intervention approach.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency and Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Insight, Strategy and Inclusion, attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the objectives of the Strategy over the next four years were to:

- Support people in poverty;
- Strengthen communities in their resilience to poverty;
- Improve life opportunities for residents who are living in poverty.

The draft Anti-Poverty Strategy was appended to the report. It was being developed in partnership with the voluntary and community sector (VCS). In December 2021 a Hardship Alliance was created engaging four key VCS partners. Amy Garstang, Chair of the Hardship Alliance, attended the meeting to give a VCS perspective on the development of the Strategy.

The report stated that the draft Strategy had been subject to public consultation in January and February 2022 and would be updated to build in responses. Further development with the Hardship Alliance would take place in the coming months. The revised Strategy was due to be presented to the Executive for approval on 26 May 2022.

During the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

The overarching strategy did not say much about preventing poverty in the Borough. Possible wording could be “doing all that we can to ensure that no one lives in poverty in the Borough”. Councillor Blumenthal commented that she was happy to look at wording which strengthened this aspect of the Strategy.

There were a number of issues currently which had an impact on poverty in the Borough. These included the effects of the pandemic, the energy crisis, house prices, changes to National Insurance and the rise in inflation. The Council and its partners should be lobbying on a range of issues. The introduction to the Strategy should be amended to reflect the range of challenges facing residents in the Borough. Councillor Blumenthal welcomed ideas for lobbying and exploring the steps that the Council could take to publicise the impact of these challenges.

Rachel Burgess raised the issues around in-work poverty and put forward a proposed recommendation to the cross party Anti-Poverty Working Group:

“Wokingham Borough Council will work towards becoming an accredited Real Living Wage Employer and will encourage local employers and supply chains to do the same”.

The proposal was seconded by Sarah Kerr.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposed recommendation was approved. Councillor Blumenthal stated that the cross-party working group would be happy to consider the recommendation.

Was there any additional funding to support delivery of the Anti-Poverty Strategy? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that the Government had provided grant funding of £500k to support the development and delivery of initiatives being created as part of the Strategy. The Council was developing a strong team to implement the Strategy and work closely with the VCS. Amy Garstang confirmed the strong working relationship between the Council and the Hardship Alliance.

It was noted that there had been 140 responses to the consultation on the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. Did Officers know how many of these respondents were in the

vulnerable groups? Mark Gwynne confirmed that the consultation did not specifically seek information on different categories. However, it appeared that 40/50% were in the Just About Managing group. There was an ongoing issue relating to the availability of recent data to inform the development of the Strategy.

Had any briefings been provided for the Town and Parish Councils? Mark Gwynne confirmed that Officers had met with the Town and Parish Councils in January 2022. Officers were happy to have further discussions following the consultation exercise.

As already mentioned, a number of ongoing national issues were likely to significantly increase the number of people in debt over the short term. Did the Strategy factor this in? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed the Strategy would include short and longer term measures.

The report referred to the growing number of children in the Borough who were eligible for free school meals. It was important to maximise the number of children eligible for free school meals whilst, at the same time, minimising any potential stigma attached. There was a concern that some parents did not wish to come forwards even though their child was eligible. It should be seen as a helping hand rather than a handout. Members with experience in local schools felt that the existing system did make the process anonymous.

Whilst the closer working relationship with the VCS was welcomed, it was still important to be clear about accountability in delivering the action points in the Strategy. Could the relevant Members or Officers be highlighted in the Action Plan? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that this suggestion would be considered.

One way to increase the uptake of free school meals would be to extend the eligible age group. The Council could lobby the Government on this issue. Items such as uniforms and technology also needed to be more accessible and inclusive.

Could the next update to the Committee include the specific actions underpinning the Anti-Poverty Strategy together with the relevant costings and funding sources? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that this information could be included in future reports.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Laura Blumenthal and Mark Gwynne be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions on the Anti-Poverty Strategy;
- 2) the cross-party Anti-Poverty Working Group consider the Committee's recommendation that: "Wokingham Borough Council will work towards becoming an accredited Real Living Wage Employer and will encourage local employers and supply chains to do the same".
- 3) the Chairman write to Councillor Blumenthal with a summary of the Committee's ideas and suggestions relating to the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

37. EQUALITY PLAN UPDATE

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 45 to 58, which gave details of progress of the year 1 action plan which underpinned the Council's Equality Plan 2021/25. The Equality Plan aimed to deliver a programme of improvements against the

Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The report also set out the action plan for year 2.

Laura Blumenthal, Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency and Mark Gwynne, Interim Head of Insight, Strategy and inclusion attended the meeting to introduce the report and answer Member questions.

The report stated that the year 1 action plan had set out 29 actions which would progress towards the “Developing” level of the EFLG. The EFLG comprised four themes around which the action plan was structured and on which progress would be monitored. The themes were:

- Understanding and working with your communities;
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
- Responsive services and customer care;
- Diverse and engaged workforce.

Mark Gwynne highlighted progress in the Year 1 action plan in areas such as procurement, communications, customer experience and data collection. A cross-party Member working group had been established together with a Member learning and development programme. Externally, a Residents Equality Forum had been set up and work was ongoing to support a refresh of the BME Forum.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

In relation to Action 18 in Appendix 1 – what training had been provided on Equality Impact Assessments? Mark Gwynne confirmed that more details on training provision could be circulated to Members.

How did pay gaps fit into the Equality Plan? Councillor Blumenthal stated that she would discuss this issue with the Officers.

In relation to Action 17 – could some examples of Role Model behaviour be included, e.g. the calling out of hate speech? Councillor Blumenthal stated that this suggestion would be considered.

Could the list of protected characteristics be extended, e.g. to include socio- economic factors. Mark Gwynne stated that this could be considered.

In relation to the EFLG, was the assessment free of charge? Mark Gwynne confirmed that this was the case as a result of the Council signing up to the framework.

In relation to Action 2 – was the Plan co-produced? Councillor Blumenthal stated that the potential for more co-production could be explored in future.

In relation to Action 15 – Celebrate successes – where was the first case study published? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that details of the first case study could be shared with Members.

Could RAG ratings be attached to the actions to give a clearer picture on which actions were progressing well and could the data be broke down into wards? Councillor Blumenthal stated that these ideas could be investigated further.

In relation to Action 11 – could a deeper dive take place into modern-day slavery within supply chains? Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that this suggestion could be pursued.

It was confirmed that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was doing good work on equalities. Was there potential for sharing ideas and training? Councillor Blumenthal stated that she would be happy to contact the service to discuss the potential for joining up.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) progress against the Equality Plan Year 1 Action Plan be noted;
- 2) the Equality Plan Year 2 Action Plan be noted;
- 3) the ideas and suggestions from Members be incorporated into the future development of the Equality Plan;
- 4) the Committee receive an annual update on progress against the actions in the Equality Plan.

38. CUSTOMER EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report, set out at Agenda pages 59 to 64, which provided an update on the Council's Customer Excellence Programme. The report gave details of the existing Council access points and the overall aims of the programme which were to move to:

- Standardised customer service across departments and ownership of customer experience to be organisation-wide;
- A new website centred on the needs of our residents;
- Customer insight used proactively as part of a customer-centric strategy which drives continuous improvement across the Council;
- Easy to use, streamlined customer journeys, focussed on customer need.

Gregor Murray (Executive Member for Resident Services, Communications and Emissions) and Jackie Whitney (Head of Customer Delivery) attended the meeting to present the report and answer Member questions.

The report gave details of the five year change programme, highlighting the key projects and workstreams and the expected benefits to be delivered for residents. The programme would be informed by data and customer feedback.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points:

How would Member feedback be incorporated into the programme? It was confirmed that a cross party Member working group would meet to consider progress and would act as a conduit for Member views. Members on the working group included Gregor Murray (Chairman), Shirley Boyt, Stephen Conway, Jim Frewin and Pauline Jorgensen.

As part of the data gathering exercise, would real life case studies be used? Jackie Whitney confirmed that real life situations would be used. The aim was to get to the root

cause of any problems and to understand any unintended consequences from service changes.

What was the level of engagement with key services? Jackie Whitney confirmed that there was strong engagement with services. Customer delivery officers acted in a business partner role.

Some Members found contacting specific Officers challenging. Could Members be provided with a list of key Officers together with their contact details? Jackie Whitney confirmed that a list could be put together and circulated to Members.

A key issue was the use of jargon and Council speak. What steps were being taken to ensure that plain English was used as much as possible in Council communications? Jackie Whitney confirmed that the Council was working with a specialist company to review the content and tone of Council documents and forms. This would extend to the improvement plan for the Council website.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Gregor Murray and Jackie Whitney be thanked for attending the meeting to answer Member questions on the Customer Excellence Programme;
- 2) the update on the Customer Excellence Programme be noted;
- 3) Member comments and suggestions be used to inform the development of the programme.

39. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORTS

The Committee considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual reports for 2021/22, set out at Agenda pages 65 to 84. The reports gave details of the issues considered by each of the Committees and the impact of their work during the year. The reports would be submitted to the March Council meeting.

Alison Swaddle commented that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee report should be updated to include reference to discussions held at the recent meeting.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2021/22, as amended, be approved;
- 2) the Annual Reports be submitted to the Council meeting in March 2022.

40. CONSIDERATION OF THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The committee considered a copy of the Executive Forward Programme as set out on Agenda pages 85 to 92.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Forward Programme be noted.

41. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered its forward work programme and that of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees, as set out on Agenda pages 93 to 102.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes be noted.

42. ACTION TRACKER REPORT

The Committee considered the latest Action Tracker report, set out at Agenda pages 103 to 106.

The Chairman confirmed that she would be meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive on 6 March 2022 to discuss ways of developing the working relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Executive.

RESOLVED: That the Action Tracker report be noted.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
LICENSING AND APPEALS COMMITTEE
HELD ON 2 MARCH 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.18 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Chris Bowring, Rachel Burgess, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Barrie Patman (Chairman), Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Bill Soane and Shahid Younis (Vice-Chairman)

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist
Karen Court, Senior Licensing Officer
Moirra Fraser, Policy and Governance Officer
Rachel Lucas, Legal Specialist
Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer, Compliance and Enforcement
Ed Shaylor, Head of Enforcement and Safety

25. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Parry Batth.

26. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below, and signed by the Chairman.

Amendment: That Sean Murphy, as an Officer, be removed from the list of Committee Member attendees.

Matters arising

Councillors asked for an update on the process which had been undertaken to deal with the Committee's recommendation to freeze the 2021/22 fee for taxi vehicle licences at the same level as the previous year and to re-imburse those that had already paid the higher fee in 2021/22.

Ed Shaylor, Head of Enforcement and Safety stated that the proposal to subsidise the fees for taxi vehicle licences in 2022/23, as recommended by this Committee on 26 January 2022 had been submitted to the Council in February 2022 as part of the fees and charges report. Members asked for reassurance that the subsidy had been submitted to Council in February 2022, as this was not clear within the budget documents. Ed Shaylor agreed to email Members with the information about the fees within the budget papers which were submitted to Council.

Members expressed frustration that there had not been an explanation of how the decision to not carry out the Committee's recommendation for the subsidy in 2021/22 had been taken. Members questioned the legality and transparency of the process.

Members asked for an explanation about the decision making process in relation to the recommendation to freeze fees for 21/22. Ed Shaylor informed the Committee that Sean O'Connor, Legal Specialist would be emailing Members about the process in relation to the Committee's recommendation for the subsidy in 2021/22.

In response to a question about the Taxi and Private Hire Policies, Julia O'Brien, Principal Officer Compliance and Enforcement explained that the solicitor who was working on it had only sent the draft policy today. She ascertained that the report would be ready for the June meeting of the Committee.

In response a question Officers informed that the Council had still not received a response from Reading Borough Council with regard to the use of Reading bus lanes by Wokingham drivers. The Chairman stated that the Leader of the Council was having conversations with Reading about this issue.

27. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

28. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

29. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

29.1 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Chairman of the Licensing and Appeals Committee the following question:

Question

Wokingham Town has been experiencing a considerable amount of Anti-Social behaviour revolving around people leaving the bars that have a late licence. This can be as simple as noisy behaviour and broken glass around the town from people heading home to fighting and a recent stabbing incident.

Wokingham Borough Council has the power to recover a late licence levy on premises that have a late licence – essentially to cover the cost of extra policing and support from problems that arise from late licences.

Is this something that we can ask the licencing team to consider?

Answer

Licensing authorities have (since 2012) had the power to introduce a "late night levy" on premises licensed to sell alcohol after midnight. The levy must cover the whole of an authority's area, although the Government is considering amending the rules so that just a part of the Borough can be subject to a levy, e.g. a town centre, but it has not done so yet.

The Council cannot set its own levy – the amount of the levy is prescribed nationally based on the rateable value and varies from £299 for the smallest premises up to £4,440 for the largest premises in which the primary business is the sale of alcohol. There would be costs to the Council to conduct consultation and administer the scheme.

The revenue raised, after deduction of costs, goes towards the costs of policing the late-night economy and must be split between the Council and the police. At least 70% of the revenue must be given to the police and the Council can retain up to 30% to fund the services it provides to manage the night-time economy. Examples of using the levy around the country are:

- additional police officers

- projects like a Club Host project aiming to reduce sexual harassment within clubs
- first aid training for staff of licensed premises,
- defibrillators for town centres
- taxi marshals and street cleaning

The Government estimated that about 94 licensing authorities had enough late opening premises to generate sufficient revenue from the levy to make it worthwhile to implement it but in the 9 years since it came in very few Council areas have put a levy in place. The number is about 10 or 12 and are mostly large towns like Newcastle, Nottingham and Liverpool and urban Boroughs like Hackney, Camden and Islington,

Cheltenham introduced a levy in 2014, but scrapped it in 2017 as the Council had not received the income it had expected from the levy.

Late night levies are strongly opposed by the licensed trade who believe them to heap financial pressure onto venues that are already contributing financially to the success of their areas, and to be a blunt tool that penalises well run businesses, as well as those which might be causing problems. This is because there are only a few exempt premises allowed – the levy would apply to all on and off sales premises with a late licence in the Borough, even if they are not actually open at those times.

In conclusion, the main concern is that levies in a Borough like ours would not be financially viable, as the revenue raised would be small in comparison to the cost of implementing the scheme.

Coupled with likely opposition from the licensed trade which has suffered financially for two years, I would prefer to tackle any problems which arise in another way.

For example,

- from April the Council will have a team of Anti-Social Behaviour officers working until 2am on Friday and Saturday evenings, who will be able to observe if there are any problems arising from late night licensed premises and make recommendations for improvements in the management of those premises.
- If a venue is not well run, we can review its licence.

However, our Statement of Licensing Policy (which is due for renewal in 2023) states that late night levies could be considered if the need arises. So, I see no reason why a late-night levy could not be at least considered in the review of the Licensing Policy, in the light of whether there is enough evidence of need and whether the levy scheme would be financially viable.

Supplementary question

Considering that in Wokingham town the bulk of the antisocial behaviour that we get from the late licences happens between 2 and 4 am, I understand that Wokingham Town Council has CCTV around the Town Hall and we get to see, we know when the trouble happens, and particularly the recent stabbing happened after 3 o'clock when the individuals left the Gig House, left the pub. And I know, a lot of the trouble we get around there, when I talk to residents around there, it is, you know, at 3.30 early hours of the morning. What you are talking about, the antisocial behaviour team there, they finish work at 2 o'clock, which is not, it is too early to tackle this problem. So, my question is what are we going to do to tackle this problem? People are having to walk their dogs with broken

glass in the morning, we get broken windows around the town, things like our Christmas trees and hanging baskets and stuff around the town are getting vandalised in low level ways but we also get broken windows and occasionally we get severe things like the stabbing we had a few weeks ago. We also had another stabbing near the station last year as well. I want to know what is Wokingham Borough Council going to do to tackle this problem, particularly when the problem happens when the pubs are closed, after the pubs closed. It seems that the antisocial behaviour service has shut shop by then.

Supplementary Answer

Yes, I think as I mentioned we are reviewing the Licensing Policy and the item on the agenda which relates to the return of the licensing functions from the Public Protection Partnership is going to actually look at that. I think there might be some information in there that you might find helpful with regards to that in the way it is going to be organised, because there are plans to actually put people in place to that are going to be around until 2 o'clock in the morning but they may well even be able to extend that, (*"but as I said 2 o'clock is too early, late licenses end at 3 o'clock"* said Councillor Imogen Shepherd-DuBey) yes, we can feed that back to them, this is not cast in stone yet, we can probably make some proposals for that, and with regards to that I suggest you perhaps wait until you received that and make some comments with regards to that.

Councillor Soane confirmed that the Antisocial Behaviour Team did finish at 2 o'clock and that could be revised. However, the cost involved would be considerable. The need for increased hours of work would be monitored.

With regards to the stabbings, Councillor Soane stated that they were a matter for the police and the Antisocial Behaviour Team would not be dealing with them anyway.

30. HACKNEY CARRIAGE TARIFFS

The Committee received a report detailing the outcome of the consultation on increase to hackney carriage fare tariffs.

Ed Shaylor stated that responses had been received to the consultation, as detailed in the report and appendixes. The Committee was now asked to make a decision, based on the information provided. The options were as described in the report.

It was pointed out that it might be advisable to change the date in which any changes come into effect from 1 April to 4 April, this was because another neighbouring local authority was also altering its fees and there may be a delay in being able to recalibrate the meters.

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

- Councillor Younis asked why we were prevented from implementing changes on 1 April;
- Moira Fraser, Policy and Governance Officer explained that Wokingham was not prevented from implementing changes from 1 April. She explained that the PPP had been approached from one of the meter companies who suggested that they may not be able to provide the service from 1 April;
- Councillor Burgess proposed to agree to the trade's proposal and to accept the Officers modification that the 110 second waiting time be retained. She pointed out that the number of objections was low and she worried that not allowing a rise would

make some drivers leave the trade and this would have negative consequences in the provision of the service;

- The Chairman stated that the proposed increase would put Wokingham's taxi fees amongst the most expensive in the country;
- Councillor Burgess stated that some drivers had already gone out of business and that Wokingham was a very expensive place to live;
- Councillor Bowring stated that it was difficult for anyone to ascertain what the fees should be. However, he agreed that the Committee should accept the trade's proposal, in view of the fact that drivers could lower the fare tariff if they wanted to. Should drivers decide to lower their tariffs, he asked if the Council would be able to help publicise this change;
- Councillor Kerr wished to clarify that the table on Appendix D of the Agenda was not the complete table, looking at the complete list, Wokingham would not be the second highest in the country;
- Councillor Younis was in support of the trade's proposal to increase the tariffs for the following reasons: the last time the fees were reviewed was in 2010, there had been considerable inflation in the last 11 years, their business had been severely impacted by the pandemic in the last two years and the upcoming increases in energy bills. He believed that if this increase was not allowed, a number of drivers would go out of business, resulting in unreliable services;
- Councillor Fishwick agreed with the trade's proposals. He pointed out that the local authorities listed in the comparison table had not raised their fees for a long time and were playing 'catch up';
- Councillor Loyes asked if the request to move back the time from 11pm to 10.30pm was for weekends only or for every day. It was clarified that this was for everyday;
- Councillor Fishwick asked how many vehicles would be affected by the issue with changing the meter;
- Moira Fraser stated that there was an issue with a particular make of meter;
- Councillor Soane was of the opinion that delaying the start date by three days was not a problem, and it was better if everyone started on the same day;
- Councillor Younis asked how the Council ascertained that all vehicles had had their meters changed;
- Moira Fraser stated that the meter companies issued a certificate of recalibration which was sent to the Licensing Authority. She added that there was a legal requirement that companies undertake the change by 17 April, which was two months after the end of the consultation period.

After discussions and upon being put to the vote, Members voted in favour of implementing the changes proposed by the trade, with the Officers recommendation to retain the 110 second waiting time. It was also agreed that the start date be set at 4 April.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The modifications to be made to the table of fares at Appendix C as requested by the taxi trade are approved;
- 2) The 110 seconds waiting time be retained; and
- 3) The changes will take effect from 4 April 2022

31. RETURN OF LICENSING FUNCTIONS FROM PUBLIC PROTECTION PARTNERSHIP

Ed Shaylor addressed the Committee to give an update on the return of licensing functions from the Public Protection Partnership to Wokingham from 1 April 2022.

Ed Shaylor drew attention to the new staffing structure, as described on page 28 of the agenda. The new Licensing Manager had been appointed and his name was Keiran Hinchliffe.

It was hoped that the change process would be seamless, with licence applicants still able to use the same email address. Wokingham's licensing website pages were being rebuilt, and the new website pages would go live in April.

There would be an online payment system for small amounts, and invoices for amounts higher than £100, in order to facilitate the recording of payments.

The intention was to move to online forms so that people would be able to apply for applications online. However, this required new software and capital investment, which was in the forward plan.

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

- Councillor Kerr asked if any members of staff were coming from the PPP, and if there were concerns around continuity of services;
- Ed Shaylor informed that one colleague was coming over from the PPP, there would be three new members of staff and one new manager. Across the whole service there were nine people coming over from the PPP;
- Councillor Younis requested that in one year time, a report be brought back to the Committee, with KPIs and evidence that the service being provided in house is better than the service that was provided by the PPP;
- The Chairman was concerned that it might be difficult to draw comparisons as the structures were very different;
- Councillor Ferris asked if the remit of the Licensing Appeals Committee changed as a result of Wokingham now delivering services in-house, he wondered if the remit would increase;
- Ed Shaylor agreed to bring back a review report in one year time;
- Ed Shaylor was of the opinion that the licensing service that had been provided by the PPP had been good, so he questioned if it would be possible to prove that licensing services were better in-house;
- Ed Shaylor suggested that it may be appropriate for the Overview and Scrutiny to look at Environmental Health, Public Protection and Antisocial Behaviour services;
- Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey stated that the Committee wished to be kept informed of any major issues happened before one year time;
- Ed Shaylor agreed to keep the Committee informed of any risks;
- Councillor Bowring stated that the PPP was responsible for Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing. He pointed out that the licensing function was not changing, just being delivered from Wokingham. However, he questioned if it was possible extend the remit of the Licensing Committee to include Trading Standards and Environmental Health;
- The Chairman stated that before the PPP was created, Environmental Health and Trading Standards were within the remit of the Licensing Committee;
- Councillor Soane asked if there was a training requirement to sit on the Licensing Committee and that this might limit who could attend to hear reports about Environmental Health and Trading Standards;

- Rachel Lucas stated that the licensing function was statutory and the local authority was required to have a Licensing Committee. She believed that there was no statutory requirement in relation to Environmental Health, Antisocial Behaviour and Trading Standards. She confirmed that training was required for all those Members sitting on the Licensing Committee, to enable them to sit on Licensing Sub-Committees;
- Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey suggested that training be offered to Members in relation to Antisocial Behaviour and other areas that the PPP covered that Members were not currently trained for;
- Rachel Lucas questioned the need for training in relation to Antisocial Behaviour given that there were no decisions to be made in this respect. Licensing applications did not fall within the remit of Antisocial Behaviour. The powers that the local authority had in relation to Antisocial Behaviour did not fall within the remit of Sub-Committees, they are at Officer level;
- Councillor Younis asked that consideration be taken to not duplicate work unnecessarily;
- Councillor Kerr suggested that a report with options and more information be submitted to the Committee for consideration;
- Councillor Firmager suggested that it would be useful to include information in the training about decision making, with clarification on which decisions are made by the Committee and which decisions are made by Officers;
- Councillor Bowring stated that the scrutiny function was very different from the function of this Committee which was a decision making body. He was of the opinion that this was a political decision;
- Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey pointed out that the Community and Corporate Scrutiny Committee had a heavy workload, and had had a few extraordinary meetings in the past year, she worried about adding to their workload;
- Councillor Ferris stated that Antisocial Behaviour could sit with Community Safety Partnership, but he was concerned that there needed to be a discussion and thinking about where other areas would sit in the future;

REOLVED That the report be noted and that a progress report would be submitted in one year time.

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 7 MARCH 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Halsall (Chairman), Graham Howe, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro, Wayne Smith and Bill Soane

Other Councillors Present

Rachel Bishop-Firth
Laura Blumenthal
Prue Bray
Gary Cowan
Clive Jones

111. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillors Parry Bath, John Kaiser and Gregor Murray.

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.

112. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

113. STATEMENT BY THE LEADER OF COUNCIL

The Leader of Council made the following statement:

I have led the Borough and spoken about Covid over the last two years. I would never have believed that we would have emerged from Covid to a potentially greater tragedy.

I am sure I speak for the Council and indeed the whole Borough, when I express shock, sorrow and anger for Russia's antagonistic and gratuitous assault on Ukraine.

The war in Ukraine is tragic. It is bringing and will bring more destruction, maiming and loss of life. The queue of refugees now approximately 1.7 million is the greatest movement of people since the second world war in Europe. It is a catastrophe.

Freedom needs to be dearly protected. And what is freedom? It is the power to live as one wishes, and that is now what is now being challenged. Ukraine is a sovereign and democratic nation pursuing self-determination. Ukrainians must be able to live their lives as they chose.

The Ukrainian flag has been flown over Shute End to underline the whole Council's and I believe the whole Borough's support for the Ukrainian people in this their hour of need. It will stay there until there is some resolution which may be some time. This is a moment when the tectonic plates have moved and will almost certainly not go back to where they were. The human and economic cost will be huge and long lasting.

As Councils we will deal with the ramifications of this war. This will include responding to refugees and displaced persons, issues relating to energy, the cost of living and cyber security.

We must now recognise that this is now our concern, seek to manage those things within our control and encourage Her Majesty's Government to the maximum within its own control.

I have set up an Officer architecture (Gold, Silver and Bronze) across the Council to consider planning what can and should be done. We will be thinking about a range of eventualities and planning for them. This will be managed in the same way as we did Covid – regular meetings to respond to the challenges, as they arise and to be concurrent with Government guidance and national policy. I will reinstate the Leaders' meetings, and Councillor bulletins as appropriate.

I know that there is a frustration to do something and to do it now. Rest assured that demands will be placed on us. We are only at the beginning of a very long process. We will be facing huge challenges. We must meet them organised and planned. We will work with our voluntary sector partners, our health partners and our community safety partners, and we will do this whilst not neglecting our residents' current needs.

We have a Ukrainian community, which we are reaching out to. We must ensure that we are doing all that we can for them. We are currently offering facilities for the collection and distribution of aid to Ukraine and will support local agencies who offer a similar service.

We have also a Russian community within the Borough, who should not be penalised for Vladimir Putin. We do not have an argument with the Russian people but with the Russian Government, its dictator and his acolytes. We need to make this clear in anything we do and say.

We may well see certain commodities rise substantially in price particularly energy, some foodstuffs, and mined materials. This will hit certain sectors of our community particularly hard, particularly after Covid.

I have written to the Prime Minister expressing my support for his six-point plan, which is to:

- **mobilise an international humanitarian coalition.** We must all work together to establish an immediate cease-fire and allow civilians safe passage, food and medical supplies.
- **do more to help Ukraine to defend itself.** More and more nations are willing to provide defensive equipment. We must act quickly to coordinate our efforts to support the government of Ukraine.
- **maximise the economic pressure on Putin's regime.** Going further on economic sanctions, going after the oligarchs including Mr. Putin himself and wean off the Russian oil and gas that bankroll Mr. Putin's war machine.
- **no matter how long it takes, prevent any creeping normalisation of what Russia does in Ukraine.** We cannot allow the Kremlin to bite off chunks of an independent country and inflict immense human suffering and then creep back into the fold.
- **be open to diplomacy and de-escalation,** provided that the government of Ukraine has full agency in any potential settlement.

- **act now to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security.** This includes not only bolstering NATO's eastern flank but also supporting non-NATO European countries that are potentially at risk of Russian aggression, such as Moldova, Georgia and the nations of the western Balkans. And those that participate or enable Russian aggression, such as Belarus, will be subject to maximum sanctions.

As events unfold, we must welcome those seeking sanctuary here in whatever numbers eventually arise. We are a great Borough and we have great residents and we shall have to rise to the challenge as the numbers may be greater than anything we have ever experienced before. This is against a background of the aftermath of Covid and a huge pressure on our housing.

The Ukrainian refugees will need housing, schools, jobs, financial help and assistance in integrating into society. In short, they will need all the help the Council and Government can give.

We are required to divest ourselves of all Russian and Belarus contracts and investments. In practice, we have none directly with the Council, or at least so I believe. The pension fund has an immaterial exposure to investments with Russia and Belarus and their economies and has been instructed as we have to divest themselves of any exposure that they may have.

While some rules around Covid have now been relaxed and we are getting underway with living with Covid, the virus is still circulating so we should continue practicing some of the safety measures to ensure that we are protecting ourselves and those around us.

While there is no longer a legal requirement to self-isolate, you are still advised to stay at home and avoid contact with other people if you test positive.

Following the shift in tone from central Government, we are working towards a future where we learn to live with Covid as an endemic disease. We anticipate a shift in policy and guidance at the end of the month. With that ahead of us, on Friday the ONS survey reminded us that 1 in 30 people living in England currently have Covid, so we must keep in mind that the current guidance continues to encourage people to get a PCR test when they have Covid symptoms and isolate where appropriate.

Our ongoing Covid endemic response will include supporting the vaccination programme, continuing our work with high risk settings, and communication for individual risk management as well as working to minimise impact of endemic Covid on vulnerable individuals and communities. We will be working within even tighter financial means as the majority of the Government's resource for the Covid response is ending this month. In line with Government guidance our self-isolation calls and contact tracing ended last week and the WBC rapid covid testing service will come to a close at the end of the month.

Our vaccination clinic running on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Wokingham Central Library continues to offer 1st, 2nd and booster doses of the vaccine to all residents over the age of 12. Importantly we are reaching residents who have not previously come forward for the Covid vaccine. Please can I encourage all of you to spread the word about this vaccination offer with residents within your wards and engage in vaccination conversations where residents have questions. We are also working with our health colleagues on the vaccination programme for 5 to 11 year olds and on delivery of the Spring booster

programme within the Borough. So the message is please, please, please get everybody to use this facility and get vaccinated.

We remain mindful that different people in our communities are entering this period of transition with different perspectives. We need to continue to work together, to be patient and understanding within our communities, so that we can move forward and begin to recover from the pandemic together.

If I now move to school places, the overall picture for National Offer Day in Wokingham is consistent with last year, despite there being a large increase in the number of young people in the Borough applying for secondary school places.

To put this into the local context, in 2022 93.76%, that is approximately 94%, of pupils received an offer from their preferred list and 76.21% received their first preference. In 2021, it was lower at 93.51% receiving a preferred offer and 71.12% their top choice.

The Council was expecting an increase in applications this year and worked with schools across the Borough to increase the number of places available. We successfully negotiated with Piggott, Emmbrook and St Crispin's to increase the total number of secondary school places available in the Borough by 176.

Despite this success, there is still currently a shortfall in places within Wokingham Borough. The Council is continuing work to address this and expects to have additional places added within the Borough in the coming weeks. My colleague, Graham, will talk about this more in the coming meeting.

School place planning is a complex process, particularly in areas where most of the schools are already over-subscribed. The Council recognises how important it is to get it right and is not only working with local schools on current and future expansion plans but also recognises the need to allocate additional resources to the school place planning process going forward.

The hoped-for return to public transport has not occurred and the patronage of buses is well down on pre pandemic levels. Despite the announcement of a continuation of some form of Government restart grant, some services will be degraded though we are working hard to ensure that they are not discontinued. The message on buses is really that we have to use them or we will lose them.

I would like to remind Members that within our Constitution are the Nolan Principles. We are required to show Honesty, Leadership, Openness, Accountability, Objectivity, Integrity and Selflessness. There is ample opportunity for all Members, town and parish councils and residents to question a decision or proposal; this can be simply by giving me, the Executive Member, Chief Executive or a director a call. This administration is here for one purpose alone and that is to serve the residents. By being open and transparent hopefully if we have got it wrong it will come to light and we can get it right.

The recent debate over the Laurel Park has regrettably shown us wanting. There is ample evidence that the proposal to site a 3G pitch at Laurel Park was in the public domain in and before March 2021, when it was advertised in the Executive Forward Plan. Preliminary discussions were held with Earley Town Council in December 2020. There were no member or public questions on this proposal until February 2022, when residents en masse questioned Council. It was never raised in Overview and Scrutiny nor whilst the

budget was being scrutinised. The Executive's proposal to include it in the budget proposals, and explore and consult subject to planning, was not called in. Indeed, there is ample evidence that Earley Town Council were enthusiastic till recently. Whilst the minutes are sparse, I understand that conversations were being held to improve the pavilion to accommodate this in September 2021.

114. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

115. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

115.1 Gary Cowan asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

The Secondary School plan is for an expansion at Piggott School where there is no current or future planned house building in the North of the Borough, while there are currently 3,500 houses being built at Arborfield Garrison, Gorse Ride extension and over 500 ex MOD houses have been added to the private rental market at Arborfield Garrison; but Bohunt is not one of the schools listed. Of course, not forgetting the Council's plans for 4,500 houses at Hall Farm.

The plan delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Resources, acting in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the lead Member for Children's Services, to approve the procurement of the construction works and services etc.

As the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Children's Services both are Members for Remenham, where no houses are scheduled to be built in the foreseeable future, would Bohunt School not have been a more obvious school for expansion?

Answer

Thank you Gary for the question as a Member for Remenham, Wargrave and Ruscombe I will answer it as well as the Lead Member for Children's Services.

The additional places at Piggott School directly address an issue in that school's designated area. The rising numbers of older primary and junior school children living in the area around the school means that children living in the south of Twyford would be very unlikely to secure a place at the Piggott School without additional places. These children would therefore need to be transported to an alternative school, many at the Council's expense.

The other agreed additional places are in Wokingham Town, at the Emmbrook and St Crispin's Schools. Both of these schools sit on the edge of areas of major housing growth. Bohunt School was considered, but any growth in Year 7 places would be linked to the school's sixth form proposals and would therefore depend on a funding decision for that project. The report notes that additional capacity may be agreed at other schools. Subject to a future decision on the sixth form proposals, Bohunt School may also be able to offer additional places for children aged 11 to 16, that would both help address immediate

needs and provide additional long-term capacity for the new Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park communities.

Supplementary Question

Moving students to out of catchment areas is something that the School has done before so that is not a new thing.

When one looks at, as I saw, the madness of moving Farley Hill Primary School lock, stock and barrel to Arborfield Garrison so denying children living there actually outside the gates of the new school access meaning they had to travel by cars elsewhere to be educated.

So, my question really is can this Council, with the Leader of Council and Executive Member for Education who would appear to have a vested interest in the proposed decisions, who along with the same people who took the Farley Hill Primary School decision making this decision are they doing the right thing for Wokingham schools' children?

Supplementary Answer

If I may say so I disagree with what you are saying. What we are doing is for the good of all of the children across Wokingham, all 22,000 of them, and you know as well as anybody else, with your maturity on the Council, that it takes time to shift these things. It takes time to shift the designated areas and actually the admission policies are decided by the academies themselves and endorsed by the Schools' Adjudicator, which is outside of the local authority's control or remit.

115.2 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Regarding agenda item 115, Secondary School Places, there were difficulties over the allocation of secondary school places for Year 7 for the current academic year, with insufficient places being available in the locations parents wanted them. The Council determined that additional places would be needed for Year 7 for the next academic year.

However, now that the places for next September have been allocated, it appears that the Council has under-estimated demand, and more additional places are going to have to be provided than the Council had been planning. What caused the number of Year 7s to be under-estimated?

Answer

Thank you Prue for that question and for giving me the opportunity to clarify the situation. Your question actually crossed over with a briefing paper that has been circulated to many Members including your colleagues and I shall ensure it is given to the remaining Members because it outlines the detail on which the following outline explanation is based.

In Rumsfeld speak, there are known knowns and unknown knowns. Whilst some would suggest that school places correlate directly to houses built that is one factor, but not the only factor. Wokingham Borough Council is blessed with having very good schools. It is part of the attraction for people to move into or border with the Wokingham area. We received 783 applications compared to 739 last year. We have no way of tracking those that move into the area to catch a year 7 place as they move into existing properties and not just new builds.

In 2020/2021 we received 36 school place applications from Hong Kong nationals. We put on an extra two year 6 classes and at that time there was an unforeseen demand that now impacts our year 7 numbers. Given that schools determine their own catchment areas, there are a number of cross border applications which are difficult to predict but fall within the catchment areas determined by schools' admissions policies which is beyond the Borough's control. Indeed, Maiden Erlegh's popularity has meant that the last pupil to be allocated lives within 0.74 miles from the School. The same applies to the Holt.

There has been a steep rise in pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans. If a school is named in the pupil's plan, then the Department for Education's direction is that that pupil must go to that designated school. That reduces places for pupils without EHCPs. Some pupils use the admissions system as a 'holding station' until they are accepted into private school which was 115 pupils last year and is fairly consistent across previous years. Whilst arrangements have been agreed with Piggott, St Crispin's and Emmbrook in collaboration with their Trusts, subject to approval on agenda item 115 being agreed. We are still working with other schools to make the accommodation where we can.

We still have a situation where 53 girls are being offered places at Reading schools. Last year there were 947 places for girls and 859 in 2020. The requirement for girls this year is 1,001. Children's Services is working closely with those families to work on the best outcomes for those girls.

If Members have specific problems, please copy me on the correspondence, as then, if I know about it I can do something about it.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for that explanation. So, the Council allocates school places every year and most of the factors that you mention recur every year, the exception being the influx of Hong Kong pupils. This particular shortage in school places has hit the Council whilst the Council is working on the new secondary school strategy.

So, my question is are you confident that there will be no more surprises that might knock that strategy off course?

Supplementary Answer

Well I hope that what I have been able to explain there is that we have got the known knowns and the we have got some variables that we have to work with and they are the parameters that we have to cope with. It is partly systemic, and it is beyond our control. The schools make their own admissions policies and I must emphasise that it is our job to administer those as best we can.

Gathering information is not always easy and often ends up incomplete because people are unwilling to give it. But we have to administer it and deal with what we have in our hands and that is the way that it is.

115.3 Rachel Bishop-Firth asked the Deputy Executive Member for Equalities, Poverty, the Arts and Climate Emergency the following question:

Question

As a member of the Anti-Poverty Working Group, I am pleased to see this position statement on the Anti-Poverty Strategy come to this meeting. I would also like to

acknowledge and thank the enormous contribution made by the Officers and the voluntary sector to supporting residents with the challenges that they have faced since the pandemic started.

We want to see an Anti-Poverty Strategy with a clear and ambitious vision for Wokingham and a commitment to our residents to bring about real change. This Council can't on its own end poverty in the Borough – that would take decisive action at a national level - but we need to make a commitment to doing what we can as a Council to end the problem, both through direct action in areas which we control, and also through using our influence.

As we move towards the finalisation of the Strategy, will the Council be ensuring that the final version explicitly commits to doing all that we can, to prevent and to end poverty within Wokingham?

Answer

In short we will. The Anti-Poverty Strategy sets out the key challenges faced and will present a clear ambition, for the lifetime of the Strategy and for the future.

The Strategy needs to be ambitious and yet realistic and we need to focus on what we can do as a local council working with the local voluntary sector. Prevention and breaking the cycle is key, so of course we will do all we can within our power to prevent and eliminate poverty in our Borough.

Supplementary Question

Low income families with school age children are under enormous pressure in Wokingham and many struggle with some of the uniform and other essential school costs at our local schools. As part of the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Strategy will the Council commit to doing all that it can to work with our maintained and academy schools and their governing bodies to influence and support them to keep school costs affordable for low income parents in a way that some other councils are already doing?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, we do plan to do this.

I mentioned at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee a couple of weeks ago that we need to galvanise the Council's influence with schools, whether that be through Officers or Councillors to continuously raise the issue of affordability within school policy so that is higher up the agenda to benefit children and parents. Of course, good communication with parents on the issue of affordability will be key.

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

Question

I was concerned to read on page 16 of the feedback report that it was felt there was capacity for Improvement to ensure that the Finance, HR and Change functions have appropriate resource and capacity to deliver what the Council needs. And that there was also a need to articulate and accelerate an ambitious Organisational Development Strategy including creating a clear employer brand.

Will the necessary resources be made available to these departments in the very near future, so that these much-needed improvements can be made?

Answer

The simple answer is yes. We are a culture of continuous improvement or that is what we are trying to be and the additional resource requirements needed to address this have been incorporated into the MTFP as agreed at Council in February. If any further budget approvals are needed, they will be sought through the Executive as a Supplementary Estimate or as part of the following year's MTFP.

Supplementary Question

I certainly welcome that you have got a continuous improvement plan and that I think you have said there that funds are going to be made available but clearly the Corporate Peer Challenge Team did not think that you were doing enough at the time of their inspection. What has changed since they visited us?

Supplementary Answer

When the Peer Review Team came you will recall Bob Watson, who has been a solid part of our Finance Team, was leaving and we were uncertain as to how we would replace him, and they were concerned at the time whether we could replace him with a person of that stature. I think we have overcome that problem and we will be hopefully looking to make a permanent appointment in that position.

The other aspects of the Peer Review were that they regarded us as a very, very ambitious Council. A very well performing Council, which we are. In my view we are one of the best in the land, if not the best and I am very proud to be the Leader of it. But also, that we have huge ambitions to make it better. We want to be the best that we can possibly be and so the Peer Group identified those ambitions and have shared with us our need in various areas for extra resources which we will do as appropriate and when. The HR function we have enormous ambitions for. We are conscious of the fact that we are aspiring to be the best and we need to be providing the best working environment and best training and support for our staff and we are a long way from that at the moment.

116. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

The Executive considered a report relating to the outcome of the Corporate Peer Challenge, undertaken by a Local Government Association team in November 2021, and a proposed action plan to address the recommendations set out in their report.

The Leader of Council provided information about the Peer Challenge Review Team and highlighted some of their findings which included that the Council: delivered valued, well performing services that provided a high quality of life for residents; and achieved good outcomes for its residents, despite receiving no central Government grant funding and notwithstanding the recent pressures of Covid was financially stable.

It was also recognised by the Team that over the last three years the Council had made significant improvements in key areas including: developing a clear vision for the Borough and a recognised Corporate Plan; development of meaningful partnership relationships, including in the health and voluntary sectors; a commitment to enhance and improve the customer experience; and significant service improvements in adult and children's service directorates.

Councillor Halsall went through the review report in more detail and highlighted the many achievements that had been recognised by the Team during the review. He also highlighted the recommendations of the review as set out in Annex 1 to the report and the action plan to address these.

In summary Councillor Halsall advised that he was very pleased with the results of the review and confirmed that a six-month check-in meeting would be held with the Peer Team in May 2022 to discuss progress against the action plan and next steps.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the final report of the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2021, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted;
- 2) the Action Plan attached at Appendix 2 that addresses the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report, be approved;
- 3) it be noted that the Local Government Association will be undertaking a “six month check-in” later in 2022 to allow the Council’s senior leadership to update on the Council’s progress against the action plan.

117. COUNCIL PLAN REFRESH 2022/23

The Executive considered a report relating to a revised Council Plan and also the Annual Review document setting out the Council’s achievements throughout 2020/21 and to date for 2021/22.

During his introduction the Leader of Council explained that since the Council Plan was launched, which included key objectives and a clear vision there had been made many changes eg Covid-19 and Brexit and therefore it was felt important that the Council Plan be refreshed to take account of these changes.

Councillor Halsall advised that the objective was that the Council Plan, coupled with the Medium Term Financial Plan, should give every employee and partner an understanding of what was expected of them and what success looked like. The Council’s Key Performance Indicators were also being reviewed to ensure that the most appropriate areas were being measured.

Councillor Halsall drew Members’ attention to the Annual Review documents, set out in Appendix 2 and 3 of the report, and how much had been achieved over the last two years against the backdrop of Covid. He then went on to highlight a large number of the achievements under each objective which included: during Covid providing £53m in support to local businesses and the large number of volunteers who had worked in various areas including rapid testing centres and vaccination clinics. In addition, there was increased spending on domestic abuse, mental health support, various services relating to improving adult and children wellbeing, brought some of the services from the Public Protection Partnership back under Wokingham control, the building of four new roads etc. Of special note was the large amount of work that had been undertaken to improve the customer experience and the various elements of this work.

Councillor Halsall wished to commend Officers, particularly the Chief Executive and Directors, for the catalogue of achievements over the last two years.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the slight change in articulation of the strategic priorities as proposed be noted;

- 2) the proposed changes to the Council Plan, as summarised within the report and set out in Appendix 1, be agreed;
- 3) Council be recommended that the proposed changes to the Council Plan and updates to strategic themes are approved;
- 4) the Annual Review for 2020/21 as contained in Appendix 2 and highlights for 2021/22 as contained in Appendix 3 be adopted.

118. ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY - POSITION STATEMENT

The Executive considered a report setting out an update on the Anti-Poverty Strategy, including an overview of many of the initiatives that had supported residents in poverty across the Borough.

The Deputy Executive Member with responsibility for Poverty advised that the report contained a statement of where the Council was with the Strategy and highlighted the recent support offered to people who had been struggling delivered by the Council and the local voluntary sector. Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that the final Anti-Poverty Strategy and action plan was due to be presented to the Executive in May.

It was noted that the current Strategy was a work in progress and Councillor Blumenthal thanked the members of the Hardship Alliance, the wider voluntary sector, Officers and Councillors on the cross-party working group for their hard work informing the Strategy. There was still work to be done and it was important that all these bodies continued to work closely together to deliver the Strategy and develop the action plan over the years. It was acknowledged that working to break the cycle of poverty and doing all that could be done to prevent poverty was a challenge but the Council was resolute in doing all that it could to get as close as possible to achieving this.

Councillor Blumenthal confirmed that it was proposed to use the £500k from the Local Council Tax Support Scheme to go towards employing a number of roles, including among others a Project Officer to work directly with the voluntary sector and a debt officer based at the Citizens Advice Bureau. Building stronger links between the Council and the voluntary sector was crucial to co-delivering the Strategy.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) progress in development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy be recognised;
- 2) the extensive work completed since Covid-19 to support those in poverty across the Borough, much of which has been done by, or in partnership with the voluntary and community sector be acknowledged; and
- 3) the provision of £500k from the Local Council Tax Support Schemes Grant be agreed with immediate effect to support further development and delivery of the initiatives being developed as part of the Strategy. Any future funding that is required to deliver the Strategy will be taken back to a future meeting of the Executive.

119. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES (11 TO 16) STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report setting out a Wokingham Borough Secondary School Places (11 to 16) Strategy which would ensure that there were sufficient secondary school places to meet the Borough's needs until 2027/28.

During his introduction the Executive Member for Children's Services confirmed that the Council had a statutory duty to carry out school admission arrangements at Year 3, junior level and Year 7, entry to secondary school. This service was also offered to other year groups.

Councillor Howe advised that the report only related to entry to secondary school and the Strategy aimed to avoid the problems experienced in the past where numbers of pupils had exceeded the number of places that were available. It was expected that just under 500 additional Year 7 places were expected to be required between 2022 and 2027/28. It was noted that 9 out of the 10 Wokingham Borough secondary schools were academies and therefore could not be compelled to change their admission arrangements and changes could only be made on a partnership basis.

Following consultation with schools and their trust boards it was proposed that three schools, Piggott Secondary, St Crispin's and Emmbrook be grown to be able (in the long term) to offer in the order of 200 (11 to 18) places each. These proposals were in line with public responses to the 11 to 16 Secondary Strategy consultation in Autumn 2021 and was supported by the Borough Education Partnership.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Wokingham Secondary School (11 to 16) Places Strategy 2022 be adopted;
- 2) the Strategy be adopted and a multi-year programme of secondary expansion at Piggott, St Crispin's and Emmbrook Schools, with other schools to be identified be approved, with authority delegated to the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member for Children's Services to finalise agreements and the programme of works;
- 3) any necessary authority be delegated to the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Resources, acting in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the lead Member for Children's Services, to approve the procurement of the construction works and services as relevant to the secondary expansion strategy, with post 16 strategy and works programmes to be the subject of a later report to the Council's Executive.

120. DELIVERING THE GORSE RIDE REGENERATION PROJECT - PROCUREMENT OF CONSTRUCTION WORKS AND SERVICES

The Executive considered a report setting out the business case for the construction works and services associated with the Gorse Ride Regeneration project.

The Leader of Council reminded Members that Gorse Ride was a residential area in Finchampstead comprising of 178 properties of which 133 were Council owned and 45 privately owned. The homes were built in the 1970s for the purpose of providing accommodation for a limited period of time which was reflected in the build quality. Over the years there had been a number of issues relating to the non-traditional construction of

the homes including poor thermal insulation, some structural defects and above and below ground drainage issues. These issues had led to poor living conditions and high maintenance liabilities.

Councillor Halsall advised that the proposed regeneration would transform Gorse Ride with provision of new high quality social, rented and shared ownership homes, private market replacement homes and well designed open space. It was noted that in March 2017 the Executive agreed the intent to regenerate Gorse Ride and in March 2018 the Executive approved the progression of the redevelopment scheme. The Executive were now being asked to the procurement business case for construction works and services as relevant to the project.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to:

- 1) approve the procurement business case of the construction works and services as relevant to the Gorse Ride Regeneration project;
- 2) give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets and Director of Place and Growth to approve the awarding and execution of the construction works and services as relevant to Gorse Ride Regeneration within the funding envelope and the over-arching business case, as presented to the Executive on 17th February 2022.

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