

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 FROM 7.30 PM TO 9.10 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Bob Pitts (Deputy Mayor), Mark Ashwell, Alistair Auty, Keith Baker, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, David Chopping, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Mike Gore, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, Dianne King, John Jarvis, Nicky Jerrome, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Abdul Loyes, Tom McCann, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin, Ian Pittock, Anthony Pollock, Nick Ray, Angus Ross, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Singleton, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Rob Stanton, Alison Swaddle, Paul Swaddle, Simon Weeks, Bob Wyatt and Shahid Younis

29. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Parry Batth, Laura Blumenthal, Guy Grandison, David Lee, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Stuart Munro, Barrie Patman, Malcolm Richards and Beth Rowland.

30. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Deputy Mayor.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tom McCann declared a Personal Interest on the grounds that his daughter was employed by a company involved with the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Project.

32. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

32.1 Mr Cedric Lander asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Why does an elderly resident have to come to Council in desperation due to the failure of the Highways Department and the Leader of the Council to resolve the matter of the state of the surface of the road in Radcot Close and Western Avenue which has been classed as generally dangerous, but remains unrepaired, especially when the resident has requested an estimate for this work?

Answer

I would like to begin by saying I'm sorry that an elderly resident has felt the need to come to the Council's offices to seek action – this is certainly not something that we would want – indeed, the Leader of the Council and the Highways Team have been in lengthy correspondence with you I believe since July of this year in order to try and address your concerns. This has included providing the estimate for work which you requested, in our letter to him of 27 August.

Whilst I have every sympathy with you, particularly your difficulties, as a local authority with a severely limited budget we have to ensure that those resources we have are targeted at the areas of greatest priority.

As you would expect, we work to a schedule that identifies all of our roads and footpaths, and ensure that work is programmed according to priority, supported by a regular inspection regime.

Dangerous defects are repaired as soon as possible, and we ensure that the limited funding we have is targeted at those roads in the Borough which need the most urgent attention, addressed in priority order.

It is the Council's opinion that the surface of the roads in Radcot Close and Western Avenue are not dangerous, and therefore neither is high enough up the priority listings currently to warrant first demand on the limited budgets at our disposal.

We will, of course continue to monitor the conditions as part of our regular inspection regime.

Supplementary Question

Thank you for that and the quick response to my public question indicating that you intend to carry out a patch in one of the two areas of Radcot Close. In view of this, I strongly recommend this work is halted until further discussion takes place with Highways. Finally, in my case in Radcot Close and Western Avenue as a way forward, especially with the recent white lines put down, it might be acceptable to the Council and me for a meeting on site with Councillor Kaiser, where perhaps an agreement could be reached to both sides of this case?

Supplementary Answer

I am quite prepared to meet you on site. If you would like to contact me by email I will come along with one of the Highways Officers.

32.2 Patrick King asked a question of the Leader of the Council the following question

Given how quickly the refugee crisis has developed, even in the past week; beyond sympathy and signposting will the Council be actively welcoming refugees into the Borough and supporting those who are offering their homes?

Answer

Thank you for your very timely question. As you have probably seen within the Agenda, we have a Motion to refugees that we will be talking about.

We have seen the Government's reaction and their proposals. The Government is working up its proposals as we speak. The Home Officer Minister today said that they expect the first batch of refugees in the next few weeks. Until we have guidance from the Government on what it is looking at we cannot commit to how we are going to welcome them. We are monitoring the situation very closely and meeting regularly. We will react quickly once we know what the Government action is. Certainly, we will be welcoming refugees. Beyond that I cannot really say.

Supplementary Question

Thank for that answer. When it does become clear that refugees will be welcomed into the Borough, will the Council look to establish a group that could work with other community groups to provide that welcome in practical ways and will there be a timeframe for that once it becomes clear when the refugees are coming?

Supplementary Answer

Absolutely. I think that the voluntary organisations and churches in particular, will have a part to play in how we as a Borough handle this very difficult situation. I cannot give you a timeframe now, but part of the strategy will be to work out how we do that and we will engage with those organisations whilst we are evolving the strategy to maximise the impact.

33. PETITIONS

The following member of public presented a petition in relation to the matter indicated.

The Mayor's decision as to the action to be taken is set out against each petition

Councillor Nicky Jerrome	Councillor Nicky Jerrome presented a petition of 700 signatures calling for public toilet provision at Woodley Shopping Precinct. <i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Environment</i>
Councillor UllaKarin Clark	Councillor UllaKarin Clark presented a petition from the residents of Meadow Road in Emmbrook concerning an increase in traffic volume, speeding and long-stay parking by commuters. As well as the options suggested by the petitioners she suggested a restriction on HGVs in Meadow Road apart for access. <i>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Planning and Highways</i>

34. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

In referring to the list of Mayoral and Deputy Mayoral engagements circulated, the Deputy Mayor highlighted the Legacy of Valour Project attended by the Mayor at Reading Town Hall and that he had attended the Stanlake Meadows Community Fun Day. He commented that he thought the day had been fantastic and paid tribute to the Council's Tenant Services Team who were at the event and whose efforts had been warmly received by residents. He informed Members that he was due to attend the 40th Anniversary of the Sports Able Foundation in Windsor on Friday 18 September 2015.

35. REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL ON MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES LEVELS

The Council received and considered a report from the Independent Remuneration Panel, as set out on Agenda pages 29 to 46, following their annual review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.

David Jones, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel, addressed the meeting. He paid tribute to his colleagues on the Panel: Nicky Measures, Malcolm Saffin, Barry Cochrane and Brian Shearing. He also thanked Susan Coulter, Senior Democratic

Services Officer and Kevin Jacob, Principal Democratic Services Officer, for the guidance and administrative support that they had provided to the Panel.

In presenting the report, David Jones highlighted the following points:

- The Panel had met four times, had reviewed extensive information supplied to it and met a number of Councillors including both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Group Leaders;
- The Panel were recommending that the time contributed component of the Basic Allowance be increased by 1% to reflect increases in Officer pay. This would take the total Basic Allowance to £7,552;
- That in future any changes to the time contributed element of the Basic Allowance should mirror in any increases in Officer pay, but that an automatic escalator should not be introduced at the current time;
- That it was felt that the role of Deputy Executive Member was now fully established and payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance should continue;
- That there should not be any increase in the amount of any Special Responsibility Allowance;
- That there should be no increases to the IT allowance and amount for out of pocket expenses;
- That there be no changes to the existing arrangements for Childcare and Dependent's Carers' Allowance in that it be linked to the national minimum wage;
- That the Panel wished to reiterate strongly that expenses and allowances were rights which Members were entitled to without fear or prejudice;
- That the remit of the Panel be expanded to include having the authority to advise the Council's companies on the level of remuneration paid to the Councillors who were Non-Executive Directors. This issue had been given thorough consideration and it was the view of the Panel that its role should be expanded to include this area on the grounds of transparency and the Panel's role as a body independent to the Council.

Councillor Keith Baker thanked the Panel. He commented that he was pleased to support the Panel's recommendations as they reflected a number of suggestions he had made including the informal linkage between increases in the rates of Officer pay and allowances for Councillors and the expansion of the remit of the Panel to consider the remuneration of Councillor Non-Executive Directors.

Councillor Prue Bray thanked the Panel for its work. She commented that she supported the remarks of Councillor Keith Baker and stressed that although the final decision on allowances was the Council's under legislation, the Council had a report prepared by an independent panel before it and that this was as close to a situation where councillors did not set their own allowances as possible.

It was proposed by Councillor Keith Baker that the recommendations set out in the Independent Remuneration Panel report be agreed. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Firmager.

Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) The time contributed component of the Basic Allowance be increased by 1% to reflect the increase in Officer pay;

- 2) There be no change made to the multiples of the Special Responsibility Allowances paid to those roles as set out in the current Members' Allowances Scheme;
- 3) The Deputy Executive Members continue to be paid an SRA of £2,000 each as set out in the current Members' Allowances Scheme;
- 4) That there be no change in the rate payable for the Childcare and Dependent's Carers' Allowance as set out in the current Members Allowances Scheme in that it be set at the National Minimum wage, whatever that may be in the future, and that where there are exceptional circumstances, any increase in this allowance be approved by the Council's Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Panel;
- 5) The £500 component of the Basic Allowance for the provision of IT, communication and home office should continue to be claimed only by those Members who provide facilities which allow constituents and Officers to communicate with them by e-mail and the self-certification process be continued;
- 6) The £500 component of the Basic Allowance for out of pocket expenses should continue;
- 7) As part of their induction, Members continue to receive training in relation to remuneration and how the Members' allowances scheme and expenses works;
- 8) It be noted that Members are no longer eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme;
- 9) Members' Allowances should not be index-linked;
- 10) That the Terms of Reference of the Panel be amended to include having the authority to consider any request from a Local Authority Trading Company owned by Wokingham Borough Council for the Panel to advise them on the level of remuneration payable by that company to its Member Non-Executive Directors.

36. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

The Council considered the Treasury Management Annual Report 2014/2015 as set out on Agenda pages 47 to 80.

Councillor Anthony Pollock in presenting the report commented that the report showed continuing sound financial management. He highlighted that he was particularly pleased to note that the Council's In-House team had achieved a return of 3.66% on the investments under their management and this amounted to 80% of the interest income that the Council received. This income contributed towards supporting Council services and the Council's revenue budget.

It was proposed by Councillor Pollock and seconded by Councillor Keith Baker that the Treasury Management Annual Report 2014/2015 and prudential indicators 2014/2015 be noted.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Treasury Management Annual Report for 2014/2015; and
- 2) the actual 2014/2015 prudential indicators within the report be noted.

37. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS UNDER THE LOCALISM ACT 2011

The Council considered a report set out on Agenda pages 81 to 84 which recommended the appointment of David Jones and Carole Luurtsema as 'Independent Persons' under the Localism Act 2011.

It was proposed by Councillor Rob Stanton and seconded by Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symons that David Jones and Carole Luurtsema be appointed as Independent persons.

Upon being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED: That

- 1) David Jones and Carole Luurtsema be appointed as 'Independent Persons' under Section 28 (7) of the Localism Act 2011, increasing the number of the Council's Independent Persons to three including David Comben an existing Independent Person;
- 2) the decision made by the Council in July 2012 be reaffirmed and an allowance of £1,000 per annum be paid for the position of Independent Person

38. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Council considered proposed changes to the Constitution as set out on Agenda pages 81 to 110 relating to the electronic publication of agendas, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Council's process for the consideration of Code of Conduct complaints and the Member/Officer Protocol.

It was proposed by Councillor Paul Swaddle and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray that the changes to the Constitution be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED: That the following amendments to the relevant sections of the Council's Constitution be approved, as put forward by the Constitution Review Working Group:

- 1) Section 1 – Purpose of the Constitution

Amend Rule 1.1.10 Publication as set out in the report;

- 2) Chapter 4.4 – Committees of the Council – Health and Wellbeing Board

Add the following to Rule 4.4.23 Membership:

"l) Representative from the Voluntary Sector"

- 3) Chapter 9.1 – The Standards Committee

The revised Process for Considering Code of Conduct Complaints which replaces Rules 9.1.13-9.1.16 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report;

4) Chapter 9.3 – Member/Officer Protocol

The revised Member/Officer Protocol as attached at Appendix 2 to the report:

39. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Councillor Keith Baker, Leader of the Council:

Before I get into what I have prepared, I would like to comment on Councillor Jerrome's petition to the Council regarding public toilets in Woodley. Fundamentally she has provided a petition to the wrong Council. Wokingham Borough Council has already passed on the funds for development of the toilets and Woodley Town Council were looking at the running costs. So actually that petition should have gone to Woodley Town Council. Clearly Woodley Labour Party are absolutely on the ball here.

Can I welcome all Councillors back from their break. I hope that you are all suitably refreshed and ready for council business. Speaking personally, I had a very interesting break which I will talk about further later.

For nearly a year the Conservative Group has been acting without a Political Assistant which has been a strain on a number of people. I would like to welcome Ellis Wiggins to the Council in the role of Political Assistant to the Conservative Group. Ellis joins us from Bromsgrove and brings a wealth of experience. On behalf of the Conservative Group, I would like to thank Anne Hunter and her team for the assistance provided during the nine month period before Ellis was appointed.

I continue to progress governance improvements with our companies. The latest step forward is to have a defined job description for Councillor Non-Executive Directors. This is likely to be finalised in the next few months.

Finally, I want to provide more details on the resident engagement project for the fiscal year 2016/2017 which I have talked about at previous meetings. To put this in context, over the last five years this Council has made a total of £31.3 million of savings. For 2016/2017, a further £8.1 million of savings out of a total budget of £113million need to be added. This will be extremely difficult. For the first time, possibly for any council within Berkshire, this Council is going out on the road to engage with residents on the difficulties the Council will face over the coming years. At least five drop in sessions are planned in Charvil, Earley, Finchampstead, Wokingham and Woodley. We will also be using the full power of social media to enhance the reach of this engagement. More details will follow shortly.

Councillor Philip Mirfin, Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities

I would like to cover two areas of my portfolio this evening.

First of all regeneration. Work on the delivery of the town centre regeneration continues to move forward with the plans for the remaining three phases falling into place. It is an exciting time for the town as we will be addressing many of the issues that Wokingham currently suffers from such as the poor variety of shops and a lack of leisure facilities within the town. In March 2015 we were granted planning consent for moving ahead with the redeveloping Peach Place. It is an important project for the town which will see us building new shops and a pedestrianised square. On 2 September 2015, the Council took

a major step forward with our programme for the delivering Peach Place scheme when we made the compulsory purchase order for the site. This will enable us to secure the remaining land interests we require for developing the proposals. All being well, we are looking to start on site in early 2017 and to be completed by the end of 2018. In July 2015 we were granted planning consent to move forward with our proposals for the Carnival Pool. The first phase of this is expected to start on site in spring 2016 when we build a new 529 space multi-storey carpark and new bowling alley. We aim to have it completed by the end of 2016, ready for when the work starts on the other phases of regeneration. Over the next year we will working up designs for the remainder of the Carnival Pool site which will include a large extension to the leisure centre along with other leisure provision and apartments. Alongside this design work we will also continue the proposals for Elms Field and in response to the consultation comments, feedback from interested tenants and market testing we continue to see positive interest from prospective tenants and are working to submit a planning application by the end of this year. Subject to planning approval and in coordination with other projects in the town, we expect to start work again in 2017.

Moving on now to the Community Development Service and some of their summer highlights. The summer has been a busy period for the team this year and the priority for us across the summer months has been to provide positive activities for families in our target areas to support them across the long summer break, particularly when school is out and many other activities pause. In addition to the regular community events and outings, we have either organised or supported Borough wide summer play schemes, first with referrals and then biweekly spot checks to ensure their quality.

Two further pieces of work that we have been particularly proud of are the community arts projects with the library service. At Rainbow Park children were involved in exciting musical rainforest arts projects, from the creation of costumes and props to rehearsals and final performance. As a result the children will qualify for an arts award which will be presented at a ceremony at Winnersh Library. In the Norrey's area we have used the arts project as a way of supporting children transitioning between primary and secondary school and we worked closely with local schools and youth workers. The project was hosted by St Crispins School and the children's art work has been displayed in the school for the new parents open evening in September in addition to Wokingham Library. The second item is the National Citizen Service, (NCS) Project. This is a national initiative encouraging personal and social development for 16-17 year olds. This year our team hosted a group of NCS participants in three areas across the Borough. They joined into community groups ranging from kids clubs to bowls to Zumba. As well as broadening their awareness of local communities and the variety of experiences and challenges people face they also created a short film they collected on their visits to promote the value of community development. We felt it particularly for the young people we already work in our deprived communities to meet and work with these motivated NCS participants to raise their aspirations and increase their opportunities for the future.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Resident Services

We are passionate about customer service. We are rolling out a Council wide programme to improve our customer service and as part of this we are driving digital services. 61% of garden waste renewals are now on-line, saving costs and improving efficiency. We have seen an increase in web-chat and on-line service requests and a consequent decrease in email traffic to the service centre of 20%. We are also working to improve customer experience and now send on-request email and text updates to inform customers of their service requests. This has reduced complaints and chasing from customers and call

waiting time has reduced to 33 seconds due to the reduction in call volumes. We have improved links to our contractors; reducing re-keying and increasing first hand fix rate and customer satisfaction. In all these efficiency improvements have saved Council Tax payers £150,000 this year and as Councillor Baker said this Council is very short of money being the lowest funded authority in the country and therefore every little bit of saving we can find helps both the tax payers and the Council.

Secondly, Wokingham libraries are bucking the national trends. Customer satisfaction for our libraries stands at an amazing 99%. We have been tweaking library opening hours to respond to customer feedback and currently have 24,400 active users, an increase of 4% over last year. We have working closely with residents' groups and parish councils in Twyford and Charvil. Expected shortly is a planning application submitted to the Twyford Community Hub. This will show a potential location of a local library and many other facilities.

Councillor Haitham Taylor – Executive Member for Children's Services

2015 not only marks the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, but also the 750th anniversary of the mother of all Parliaments.

In recognition of how Parliament's work has touched all aspects of life, society, the economy, culture and beliefs, the Parliament Trust embarked on drawing together an exemplary collection to illustrate different themes in one celebration volume. It is with great pride that I am standing here today to announce that this Council's Adoption Services have been included in this book as an example of Good Practice and effective service in Local Government. This is quite an achievement.

It is important that we celebrate our successes, and I was privileged to accompany the team who have been instrumental in this work to the book launch in Westminster. I am also proud that our then Children in Care Council Chair came with us to enjoy this evening of recognition. She is an inspirational young woman, who has given so much time and energy to our Corporate Parenting Board. She has been incredibly generous and influenced lots of our decisions. She is fully employed in a caring role in our Borough and has future plans to study to gain vocational qualifications.

Over the summer the DfE have issued new guidance for Adoption Services. The Government expects Councils and independent adoption agencies to join together in order to achieve more for children. This Council is ahead of the curve, and Adopt Berkshire, which is our commissioned and shared service, has been cited in the new guidance as good practice.

Children's Services constantly strive to improve our services and this week we have welcomed a peer review team into the Borough. The team was made up of a Director of Children's Services and other senior staff from the region, with the aim to test how we will deliver on our aspirations for children in care and care leavers. It is really pleasing that the feedback validated our approach and said when the front line workers described their work with children their passion and child-centeredness' had shone through.

Lastly, I wanted to talk about the success of our Young Commissioners programme. This is an initiative to bring young people into local government and not only give them an understanding of how it works, but also to get a young person's view on the current issues within the Borough. The programme started with two young people and now has a total of four, with three working full-time and one working part-time on a summer placement before

they go to university. The Young Commissioners have been involved in a number of key projects. But just to highlight a few: they have undertaken a service review of what our young carers in our Borough can access and looked at where we can help them further. They are developing Shutters café as a social enterprise, and they are also testing out what our Homelessness and Supported Lodging services are like on behalf of young people. Be warned they have been honing their mystery shopping skills in the latter area and will no doubt be moving on to other services soon.

Councillor Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment

Although the summer has not been one of England's best, we still had very good attendance at Dinton and California Country parks and at various sports and activity events which we put on for the youth. We successfully engaged with many of them and looking forward to the added contact we have established with many disadvantaged and hard to reach groups.

We are actively preparing for wider use of our country parks for future years and I plan to be consulting on these later this year.

We are progressing with plans for our new Sports Hubs and detailed work on Ryeish Green is underway, as is initial planning for Grays Farm in Wokingham, which continues as a working Pick-Your-Own Farm until 2017. In parallel with this, we are investigating re-opening the small Sports Centre at Ryeish Green and await Business Plans from 5 interested groups which we hope to have by the end of November.

Together with our leisure provider 1Life and the C-Salt Trust, we have organised a Family Fun Day on Sunday week - 27th September from 10am to 4pm at Bulmershe Playing Fields and Leisure Centre. A wide range of taster sessions and contact with sports and activities clubs will be laid on. I do hope many councillors will visit to see the activities being put on, you will all be most welcome and the details are on the website.

Lastly congratulations to Wokingham Town Council and the help that the Borough gave in gaining another award for Wokingham in Bloom. They gained a silver gilt award this time as well as being best in the Thames and Chiltern Region. It is a very good and continuous success that the Town Council has had.

Also last weekend we had a very successful open day at Wokingham Fire Station and I know some councillors made it there. There was also the Heritage Day that Wokingham Town Council put on at Wokingham Town Hall. I was interested to see the new room to celebrate the fact that we had the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, (REME) in our Borough for so many years. Unfortunately, they have left taking away the main parts of their exhibition, but we have some bits left over.

Councillor Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance.

My portfolio includes Economic Development which I do normally speak about. Last year the Council set up "Elevate Wokingham" which has just celebrated its first year in operation.

The team have engaged with unemployed young people on projects, which included obtaining work experience and the provision of interview practice for jobseekers. Elevate is now producing a comprehensive job vacancy list that is available on their website which is updated every week. The Elevate hub has been able to offer support to many of

Wokingham Borough's residents who are looking for work or training. The project was set up with the younger generation in mind but has also benefited older people who have been able to receive support from Elevate.

Future projects include the careers fair on 7 October 2015 and continuing work with young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to support them with work experience, internships, apprenticeships and placements. Last year, the government set a number of challenging targets for Elevate Wokingham to reach. With hard work from partners and Elevate staff, these targets were achieved.

Turning to finance. Unfortunately Councillor Pauline Jorgensen has taken my thunder, but we are the lowest funded local authority and there is nothing in the next five years that is likely to change that.

However, the good news is that we are very good at collecting Council Tax and Business Rates. Considering that something like 80% of our funding comes from these areas it just shows that we collect everything that we possibly can.

For Council Tax we came 1st in the country and collected 99.5% of what was due and we will collect the other half a percent over the next seven years. In connection to Business Rates, we unfortunately came third with 99.8%, Canterbury actually collected 100% so we will try better next year, but we are the best in Berkshire.

Councillor John Kaiser, Executive Member for Planning and Highways

I would like to make a statement. I like Park and Rides! Park and Rides, 50 people on a bus equals half a km of congestion removed from our roads. The Council has been working with Reading Borough Council delivering two Park and Rides for the Borough both funded by the Department for Transport's Local Sustainable Transport Fund. The first new site is situated adjacent to the A33, South of Junction 11 of the M4 at Mere oak. This site was opened on the 17 August 2015 and is now fully operational. The second site is an alternative location for the existing Loddon Bridge Park and Ride. The new site is located adjacent to Winnersh Triangle Railway Station and is nearing completion. The site is due to open at the end of September 2015.

The Council is also working on the provision of new site at the end of A3290 near Thames Valley Park to be located on an area of land behind the Waterside Centre. A business case is currently being prepared as part of the funding requirement from the funding from the Department for Transport's Local Growth Deal. A planning application will be submitted to Wokingham Borough Council in spring 2016 which potential construction starts date towards the end of 2016.

40. STATEMENTS FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

Prior to the commencement of the item, the Mayor proposed that the time limit for statements under the item be extended 4.2.13.11 g) be extended in respect of Councillor David Chopping's statement. This was agreed.

Councillor David Chopping, Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing

The detailed application to register Loddon Homes Limited, (LHL) as a For-Profit Registered Provider (Housing Association), was submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) at the beginning of September. The detailed application forms included over 25 appendices (34 sets of documents in all) to make the case for registration and look to satisfy the requirements of the HCA.

The HCA typically takes between three to six months to determine an application for registering a new housing association and we will advise Council as soon as we have further news and updates on progress.

Encouragingly the HCA have asked for a couple of clarifications and for a copy of the Group Operating Protocol, which we advised was available on request; so we are pleased that things are clearly already moving on.

The submission is a culmination of many months of hard work by Wokingham Housing Limited, (WHL) staff, together with Wokingham Borough Council colleagues, along with detailed scrutiny by the Boards of Loddon Homes and WHL, before final sign off by Holdco.

Loddon Homes is a vital part of our strategy to support our affordable housing building plans using commuted sums to deliver projects like Phoenix Avenue and the Fosters Extra Care Home. With the significant changes being introduced by Government around housing policy, Loddon Homes may also prove useful as a way of mitigating the impacts of the Government's housing policy changes.

It is, perhaps, worth re-iterating the differences between the two Housing Companies. WHL is the Council's development company, and is tasked with building homes on council owned land, as well as commercial sites. Loddon Homes is the first of its subsidiaries, and will, providing the HCA agree, be a registered provider. This is by no means definite, as the criteria was tightened late last year and then republished in the spring, and are harder to meet. They are also not helped by the current almost weekly rumoured policy changes as the new government draws up its Housing Bill, but Loddon Homes has been designed to grow within the new frameworks so we hope it is as future proofed as we can make it at this stage.

Loddon Homes Limited is answerable to WHL, but has its own board to meet HCA requirements about self-determination, and funding. WHL is answerable to Holdco, and we are all in the process of sorting out the detail corporate responsibility, hence the importance of the Group Operating Protocol.

Of our sites, Phoenix (formerly know as Eustace Crescent) the contractors will be on site in November 2015. Fosters has had a good response from possible contractors and a short list is being drawn up, the pre-qualification stage, to enable us to go out to tender. There are also another half dozen smaller sites, where we are obtaining planning approval, which should be built and available for occupation before either of these two flagship schemes are completed, giving us another 25 or 30 units, possibly even before the end of next year.

Our staffing is now complete with the addition of Karen Howick as our business development manager and the company is no longer totally male.

Finally we are constantly on the look-out for more sites, and are identifying more possibilities on Council owned land, and are also speaking with other sources. Please do not forget we do need land, and Councillors can all help.

Perhaps we should offer a prize of naming a site after a Councillor who identifies it?

Councillor Anthony Pollock, Non-Executive Director Optalis

Since the departure of Andrew Pickup in November 2014, the post of Managing Director was held jointly by the Finance Director, Paul Steadman, and the partnerships director, Mette Le Jakobsen. This ensured continuity and stability for the organisation and the positive impact can be seen in the organisations vital statistics (sickness absence and staff turnover). I am pleased to report that on 20 August 2015 Mette Le Jakobsen was appointed permanently to the post of managing director.

The only other change to the senior team is that Paul Steadman, Finance Director, has recently left the company after being head hunted by a London based private equity firm. Optalis has subsequently been successful in recruiting an experienced finance director, who will take up their position in early October. Adequate arrangements are in place during the interim period.

I am pleased to report that since November 2014 the Optalis staff turnover has improved significantly. Across the company, turnover is at 19% for the period January to June 2015, which is significantly below industry averages both locally and regionally (29% and 24% respectively).

I am pleased to announce that following an unannounced inspection by the regulator Care Quality Commission, (CQC) on the 1st and 2nd of September to Suffolk Lodge residential home, we have just received notification that the service received a 'good' rating. This is especially pleasing as Mette and her team have worked very positively to drive and deliver a caring and open culture which was highlighted within the report. Sickness absence has equally reduced to 8.1 days average per employee in June 2015, with an underlying rate of 5.6 days when long term sickness is eliminated. Again this is an excellent performance for the organisation and below typical sickness absence rates for the industry.

Optalis continues to experience success in recruiting to key positions in the organisation, but it is recognised that recruitment is challenging for the whole of the care sector not only in our Borough, but throughout the London and the Thames valley. Optalis has invested in improvements to recruitment and selection procedures and the company strives to be a good employer, which includes both the offer of reasonable terms of employment, (we already pay the new Osbourne living wage) and a positive, well supported working environment.

41. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

41.1 UllaKarin Clark asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Can the Member please explain why bins have been relocated in the Woosehill area of Emmbrook and does this apply to all bins?

Answer

It is the case that we plan to redistribute or remove litter bins on the open spaces in Woosehill and other such locations.

Around Woosehill, there are currently 39 bins in total and we are proposing to remove/relocate 12 over the coming weeks. The reasons why this area was addressed was due to a combination of finding well used bins at some locations and virtually unused

bins at others. There were also reported issues around access to remote bins in wet weather. The redistribution/removal of bins is currently being communicated via signage and the Cleaner & Greener Team have met and walked about with many residents as well as Borough/Town Councillors.

However, we are looking at the lessons learnt in delivering these changes and we are looking at the consultation process prior to making any changes in other areas.

Once the changes are complete we will give the bins unique numbers to ease the reporting process when residents on our behalf find a bin full or damaged. Also, with over 1,000 litter bins in the Borough with 600 of them on the highways and over 400 of them in our open spaces, it's important that we have them positioned in the most strategic positions and balance the efficiency of emptying with finding the best used locations, not ignoring the cost of this service.

Overall we are keen that residents take their rubbish home with them, but fully appreciate this is not practical, or desirable, for dog poo. We also encourage resident groups to take on our 'Adopt a Street' initiative, which can include open spaces. If you know of people interested in that please do contact me or the Cleaner and Greener Team.

41.2 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Could the Member explain the reasons why there has been a welcome fall in the turnover rate of social workers, down to less than 10% from 33% last year, and significantly better than neighbouring authorities?

Answer

We know that the best practice for children is built from a consistent, stable workforce. Across the country, Authorities are struggling to recruit and retain the best workers and it is a national picture that is steadily worsening. We have focused intently on this issue in Wokingham and have implemented a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy, drawing on extensive feedback from past and present staff and taking lessons from national examples of best practice, enabling us to buck the national trend.

There have been four key parts to our success. Our starting point is investment in our workforce, including investment in training in an evidence based practice framework, called Signs of Safety.

There is a current gap in experienced Social Workers in England so we have recruited six experienced social workers from overseas to address this gap. We have drawn workers from places where Signs of Safety is the practice model to ensure maximum benefit and fit with our way of working.

We have demonstrated a commitment to ensuring that our caseloads are manageable to enable social workers to work safely and effectively.

Finally, a comprehensive training and development offer is in place for all of our social workers, building on Signs of Safety.

Supplementary Question

Can you tell me how you are implementing social work succession planning in children's social care?

Supplementary Answer

Developing our staff remains at the heart of our approach. Some of the actions in place to deliver our succession planning include exciting partnerships with universities for social workers to support newly qualified workers and ongoing professional development for our workforce. We are also 'growing our own' by working in partnership with the Open University to provide three current members of our children's workforce with an opportunity to train as social workers. Working in partnership with Winchester University for the second year, we will be welcoming in our cohort from the national Step up to Social Work Programme. Finally we have recognised that social work team managers role are amongst the most challenging to recruit to nationally and we have particular support to our assistant team managers to develop their skills to progress.

41.3 Malcolm Richards had asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was put in his absence

Park and Ride services across many towns and cities in the UK are vital for relieving traffic problems. Could the Member please give an update on the current situation with Park and Ride services in Wokingham Borough?

Answer

The Council, working with Reading Borough Council have been working to deliver two new Park & Ride sites in the Borough funded from the Dft's Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

The first new site is situated adjacent to the A33 south of junction 11 of the M4 on Mere oak Lane. This site was opened on the 17 August 2015 and is now fully operational.

The second site is an alternative location for the existing Loddon Bridge Park & Ride site. The new site is located adjacent to the Winnersh Triangle Rail Station and is nearing completion. The site is due to open at the end of September 2015.

The Council is also working on the provision of a new site at the end of the A3290 near Thames Valley Park to be located within an area of land behind the Waterside Centre. Currently a business case is being prepared as part of the requirements for funding from the Dft's Local Growth Deal. A planning application will be submitted to Wokingham Council in spring 2016 with a potential start date for construction towards the end of 2016.

41.4 Prue Bray asked the Non -Executive Directors of OPTALIS Group the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council

Following the departure of OPTALIS's Managing Director Andrew Pickup at the end of 2014, how many other changes within the senior staff have there been since then, such as those who have left OPTALIS, changed their posts in OPTALIS, or have signalled an intention to leave?

Answer

Many thanks for your question and as the Member responsible for Council owned companies I will be answering the question and can I ask all Councillors to refer all future questions on our companies to me as per the Constitution.

Before I address the question I need to clarify a few points. First and possibly most important is that detailed operational staffing issues are a matter for the company itself. I am sure that you fully recognise that personnel matters are highly confidential to the

individual and the company and therefore it is generally inappropriate to answer questions like this.

I am somewhat surprised that you ask about those who have “signalled an intention to leave” which is a potential violation of that individual’s privacy. When senior staff indicate they are leaving then this has to be carefully managed for the benefit of both the individual and the company.

However, I do understand that when a senior member of staff leaves it should not be hidden. This is why I have extended my report to every Executive Meeting to cover this aspect. It is why I have arranged for a report from the Companies Chairman to be included at every Full Council and this is what you heard from Councillor Pollock. It was not as a consequence of your question it was a consequence of me bringing in the report from the companies. This is the most appropriate communication mechanism and is carried out in full public.

Now let me turn to your precise question. You will have heard from Councillor Pollock, the Chairman of Optalis, about the changes in the company so I believe the question has already been answered.

Supplementary Question

I do welcome the changes that have been made to the Executive Agenda to provide more information and we do have more regular reports than has been the case than at some times in the past. However, things have been delayed. I would therefore ask for the same level of transparency to be available to Councillors on the limited companies as would be available to Councillors employees who are directly employed by the Council. I recognise that this information may have to be Part 2 and therefore confidential.

Supplementary Answer

I am a lit bit confused because I do not think that Councillors here get much information about staff movement within the Council. Maybe I have misunderstood you and we can talk later. But, I would stress that staffing is an operational matter for that company and therefore they need to treat it sensitivity. When it is the appropriate time it will come out. There have been no delays, the Executive meetings have happened on a regular basis, they have not been delayed, the full Council meetings have been taking place on a regular basis and have not been delayed and the reports from the Chairman have been to every single Council so they have not been delayed. It is probably my misunderstanding.

At this point, Councillor Prue Bray made a point of personal explanation:

All I am saying Councillor Baker is that if we ask a direct question about something in the Council we get a direct answer. I think we would like the same to happen in the case of the companies and information that is not necessarily going to be in the public domain, but should be available to Councillors so that we can assure ourselves that everything is correct. We find that out within the Council, we should have the same rights outside.

Continuation of Supplementary Answer

I do not know how many times I can say this. Personnel matters are generally confidential. In the ten years that I have been a Wokingham Borough Councillor I cannot recall a single question from anyone within the Council Chamber about personnel signalling their intention to leave. I think that it is totally incorrect, it is wrong and I will not

commit to providing that information. The information will be flowed through the normal processes.

41.5 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Demand and usage at the current Loddon Bridge park and ride has declined since the major 2007 flood and the subsequent ongoing flooding. The new park and ride car park does not have as many spaces as the original and has to be shared with station parking. What will you do if demand for spaces at the new non-flooding Loddon Bridge park and ride reaches the pre flooding levels of demand and exceeds the capacity of the car park?

Answer

Thank you for allowing me to speak on my favourite subject, Park and Rides and if they are successful even better!

The new Winnersh site has been delivered, together with the Mere oak site to provide a combined south Reading Park & Ride provision giving people travelling to and from Reading a viable alternative to using a car. The total number of car parking spaces for people wishing to use Park & Ride being provided across both sites is significantly more than that previously available with a net increase of circa 360 spaces.

Our current forecasts for Winnersh Park and Ride are that there are on average 80 train users and 250 Park and Ride users. Therefore the average daily spaces will be 430 leaving 60 spaces free for new users at Winnersh. This does not take account of any of the existing users switching to Mere oak as their preferred site.

The new Winnersh site is future proofed in that it could be possible to add an additional deck to the car park should the demand exceed the spaces available over a period of time. However if Winnersh is full then users will be directed to Mere oak where capacity will be available.

Supplementary Question

What will you do about overflow parking, since the patronage may increase since you would no longer require a swimming costume or kayak on occasion to actually get to your car? What will you do about the local residential streets and the problems of overflow parking there?

Supplementary Answer

With regards to the overflow, if there is an overflow it will indicate how successful the Park and Ride has been. What we will be doing as I said is double decking the car park because that is what we plan to do in the future. But you would not want us spending Council money speculatively and I would not want to do so either.

41.6 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question:

At the last Council meeting in July, Councillor Prue Bray asked about your future plans for the Library service and at that time the Executive forward programme showed an item WBC755 Library Offer due to come to the Executive in September 2015. This Library Offer item has now been deferred from September having already been deferred in both March and June this year. Why has this been delayed?

Answer

In recent years as I mentioned previously, Wokingham Borough Council Library Services have been bucking the national trend in terms of usage and popularity by increasing both the number of active library users and the numbers of visits to our libraries. Maintaining this enviable position and continuing to improve our offer is really important to us so we do not wish to rush any decisions about how best to secure value from the provision of library services in the future.

This year, both Councillors and Officers have been exploring options for the range of services and models of provision including visiting other Councils which could be adopted within our Library Service, and how any changes or innovations can have broader benefits in achieving the Council's overall vision for Borough. As with all other services, the Library Service also has to play its part in securing the long-term financial viability of the Council by finding further efficiencies. I think we have found by visiting some of the other Council some quite exciting opportunities to actually cross the line of providing better services whilst at the same time cutting costs. I am quite excited about what has been found so far.

Taking the time to properly research and assess future options for the Library Service is viewed as a prudent step at a time when the existing service is performing well. Before any proposals are finalised, the Council would also want to engage comprehensively with local residents and other service users in order to understand their views about the current and future shape of their Library Service.

I would hope that the upcoming Budget Engagement events during October will also provide an additional opportunity for residents to learn more about how the Library Services are provided and to share ideas about how they can continue to support the quality of life enjoyed by those living and visiting the Borough. We also have scheduled shortly a cross party Library Working Group to also discuss opportunities.

42. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS

42.1 Tim Holton asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question

Please can you give me an update on the Meldreth Way roundabout?

Answer

Work commenced on Thursday 3 September 2015 and the agreed contract period is six weeks. The completion date will be 14 October 2015. While there has been a need to make minor adjustments to the work programme, this does not require any alterations to the completion date. Weekly meetings are held to monitor work progress and resolving the issues to ensure the agreed programme is adhered to.

42.2 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question

Will you ensure Officers hold meetings with Winnersh Parish Council and Wokingham Town Council before, rather than after, the details of Phase 3 of the A329 cycleway are fixed?

Answer

I am surprised to hear that because I was under the impression from the last infrastructure meeting I had with Officers they had informed me that they were doing that so I am surprised if you are telling me that is not the case, but I will make sure it is done.

42.3 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question

As Councillors may be aware, residents in a number of roads in Twyford including Broad Hinton and Wessex Gardens have been experiencing parking problems for a number of years, (in fact Wessex Gardens had problems this week and it was fortunate it was not bin day or ambulance needed access). This is mainly due to commuters parking in their roads for hours. What immediate action can I tell residents will done to alleviate this position?

Answer

It is something that we are very much aware of. In the first instance, I would suggested that if there is obstruction being caused or it is dangerous the police should be contacted because as you know we do not have Civil Parking Enforcement in the Borough, but if you attend the next Executive, after that meeting if it is successful, we will have it. But there will be a delay of possibly 18-24 months because that is the time it takes to make sure all the traffic orders are correctly put in, plus the fact we then have it lay it before the Secretary of State to get his permission.

42.4 Tom McCann asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question

If someone was in the care of Wokingham Borough Council when they were a child and something bad had happened to them, how can they now talk to the Council about it and what should they do?

Answer

Obviously I am not aware of the specifics around this particular case that you might be raising, but in the first instance if you are aware of a particular person that this may have happened to I would recommend that you point them in the direction of our Director of Children's Services, Judith Ramsden.

43. MOTIONS

43.1 Motion 370 submitted by Alistair Auty

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Alistair Auty and seconded by Councillor Chris Smith.

'The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is currently holding a consultation with a view to devolving powers on Sunday Trading Laws to local authorities. This Council welcomes this move by the Government to bring more power to a local level. This Council will also properly investigate the effects on residents and businesses before altering the hours for Sunday Trading.'

Following debate, upon being put to the meeting, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is currently holding a consultation with a view to devolving powers on Sunday Trading Laws to local authorities. This Council welcomes this move by the Government to bring more power to a local level. This Council will also properly investigate the effects on residents and businesses before altering the hours for Sunday Trading.

43.2 Motion 371 submitted by Tom McCann

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Tom McCann and seconded by seconded by Councillor Prue Bray.

'This Council commits to improving the availability of timely and accurate Highways Road Maintenance information for our residents and so resolves to:

- i) Promptly publish information about roads under consideration for resurfacing and repair
- ii) Update the information as the list is refined and prioritised until it becomes the draft Roads Maintenance Programme for the next financial year

The information to be published will include:

- iii) The process by which roads are selected for resurfacing and repair together with anticipated dates for the completion of each stage of the process
- iv) The condition of all the roads put forward for resurfacing and repair
- v) The available Capital budget for roads maintenance
- vi) Prioritisation
- vii) Costings
- viii) The final list of roads agreed for resurfacing and repair in the next financial year'

It was proposed by Councillor John Halsall that the Motion be amended as follows:

'Currently the regular list of programmed repairs is updated weekly and uploaded onto the website <http://roadworks.org/>. The programmed works list is subject to variation due to environmental conditions, emergencies, utilities, development and major events (like Reading Festival and Henley Royal Regatta). The major works are already listed at: - <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/transport/roads/>. However this Council is committed to improving the quality of Highways Road Maintenance information for our residents and resolves to:

- i) Publish further information about roads under consideration for resurfacing and repair***
- ii) Update the information as the list is refined and prioritised***

The information to be published could include:

- iii) The process by which roads are selected for resurfacing and repair together with anticipated dates for the completion of each stage of the process
- iv) The condition of all the roads put forward for resurfacing and repair
- v) The available Capital budget for roads maintenance

- vi) Prioritisation
- vii) Costings
- viii) The final list of roads agreed for resurfacing and repair in the next financial year

Progress will be reported in a year.”

The amendment to the Motion was accepted by the proposer of the original Motion.

Following further debate and upon being put to the meeting, the amended Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: Currently the regular list of programmed repairs is updated weekly and uploaded onto the website <http://roadworks.org/>. The programmed works list is subject to variation due to environmental conditions, emergencies, utilities, development and major events (like Reading Festival and Henley Royal Regatta). The major works are already listed at: - <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/transport/roads/>. However this Council is committed to improving the quality of Highways Road Maintenance information for our residents and resolves to:

- ii) Publish further information about roads under consideration for resurfacing and repair
- ii) Update the information as the list is refined and prioritised

The information to be published could include:

- iii) The process by which roads are selected for resurfacing and repair together with anticipated dates for the completion of each stage of the process
- iv) The condition of all the roads put forward for resurfacing and repair
- v) The available Capital budget for roads maintenance
- vi) Prioritisation
- vii) Costings
- viii) The final list of roads agreed for resurfacing and repair in the next financial year

Progress will be reported in a year.

43.3 Motion 372 submitted by Prue Bray

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Prue Bray and seconded by Councillor Keith Baker.

‘This Council expresses its sympathy with all those who through war or persecution become refugees, and will publicise the details of local and national charities, voluntary organisations and other bodies who are providing aid for refugees, in order to assist residents of the Borough to make donations or offer other help to refugees in this country or elsewhere in the world’.

Upon being put to the meeting, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be carried.

RESOLVED: This Council expresses its sympathy with all those who through war or persecution become refugees, and will publicise the details of local and national charities, voluntary organisations and other bodies who are providing aid for refugees, in order to assist residents of the Borough to make donations or offer other help to refugees in this country or elsewhere in the world.