

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.00 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Clive Jones (Chairman), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Gary Cowan, Laura Blumenthal, Alison Swaddle, Andy Croy and Charles Margetts.

27. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Stephen Conway.

Councillor Prue Bray attended remotely and took part in the discussion of agenda items but did not vote on any item in accordance with legislation.

28. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 July 2022 and the minutes of the 22 March 2022 Extraordinary meeting were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

29. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Sarah Kerr declared a non-registrable interest in agenda item 40: Carnival Hib Public Realm Art Installation, as a trustee of Arts4Wokingham. Councillor Sarah Kerr advised that she would leave the room for the entirety of this item and would not participate in the vote.

Councillor David Hare declared a personal interest in agenda item 45: Re-procurement of Berkshire Community Equipment Service, as a Director of Optalis Limited.

Councillor Prue Bray declared a personal interest in agenda item 32: Violence Against Women and Girls, Wokingham Response to National Strategy and Statement of Expectations, as a trustee of Kaleidoscopic.

Councillors Prue Bray, David Hare and Clive Jones declared a personal interest in agenda items 37: Twyford NDP and 38: Finchampstead NDP, as directors of WBC Holdings. Further, Councillor Clive Jones declared a personal interest in these agenda items as a director at Lodden Homes Ltd. Councillor Prue Bray declared a personal interest in these agenda items as a director at Berry Brook Homes.

30. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

The Leader made the following statement:

“During the first four months of this Administration, we have found some very difficult financial issues that we as an Executive will have to deal with.

The previous Administration used £2.2m of reserves to plug the gap they had in this year’s budget. They chose to raid reserves rather than take tough decisions like increases in car

park charges. Taking £2.2m from reserves for the current financial year meant the general reserve forecast was reduced to £9m at 31st March 2023. Dealing with the revenue shortfall like this means the hole remains for the year 2023-24. This has to be addressed by this Administration.

We can't use general reserves again because this will reduce them to below £7m which is something our finance director would not allow us to do. It is of course something that we would not want to do. We don't want the government to be crawling all over us like they are in Labour controlled Slough and Conservative Thurrock.

As well as these shortfalls left by the previous Administration there are other serious budgeting issues.

- 18 bus services were not properly budgeted for after Sept/Oct
- There was no provision to complete the Winnersh triangle Park & Ride – the previous Administration knew about the overspend of £1.3m for six months but did nothing and certainly didn't budget to finish the project.
- There is no specific provision in the budget for food caddy liners and they thought they could buy the same number of blue bags this year for the same price money they spent on them last year. No thought of inflation and no thought of increases in oil prices, of course the bags are made from oil.
- There is a projected shortfall in the car park revenue budget of up to £800,000

All these issues together with the long term impact of COVID-19, Brexit, rapidly escalating costs and interest rates give us, the new Administration unprecedented challenges to deal with.

We don't want to increase car park charges, but there is no alternative, more of this issue later in the agenda.

I have been in meetings with council leaders from all over the Southeast of England and they are having the same issues that we are having with increased demand for services and dealing with inflation. One Council Leader with years of experience said the current round of budget making was, and I quote, terrible, terrible, terrible. They had not known a year like it when there were so many budget deficits as a result of emerging financial pressures.

Many additional ways of reducing costs or increasing income will need to be considered across all Council services, in addition to raising car parking charges, to ensure our financial viability and enable us to deliver the vital services needed by our residents. These will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny over the coming months, and I need to stress that this work will be extremely challenging.

It's just as well we are running the Administration now. We will not hesitate to take difficult decisions to keep our budgets balanced."

31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

31.1 Jan Heard has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the

following question:

Question:

A recent discussion with officials from the University of Reading made clear that the university is still very much focusing on the plan to build 4,500 houses at Hall Farm. At what point will Wokingham Borough Council make clear to the university that this plan is unacceptable to the Council?

Answer

As explained in answers to similar questions in May, June and July, our Administration is working with officers to look carefully at options for how we can best plan for our housing and development needs going forward in ways that ensure that our new local plan will pass as 'sound' at public examination.

I cannot pre-determine this process, however I can assure you that we are going into this process open minded, as we must, and that we will carefully consider all the views that have been expressed by residents alongside those of stakeholders and importantly, the technical evidence that must guide us to the best and most sustainable locations for new development to be located.

I would like to expand on the answer I gave at the Council meeting last week with reference to the new government requirement that flood resilience needs to be taken into account for the full duration of any proposed new development. This is particularly relevant for those proposed developments which include or are close to a major river and its flood plane and go beyond 15 years.

I will be actively pursuing this issue within the Council. I believe it will be difficult if not impossible to know the impacts of climate change could have on future water levels this far ahead. This could put into doubt the sustainability of such developments.

Supplementary question:

Before the coalition was formed, its members had made various public commitments during the election. One example, is the Liberal Democrat statement that they oppose Hall Farm on the grounds of flood risk to Lower Earley. So, I'm very pleased to hear that you are taking that seriously, a subsequent promise to me was in your supplementary answer on 30th June, that you would undertake the role strictly in line with Planning policy. Already, I am aware of an upcoming Planning application where no neighbourhood plan policies are supplied in the officers report despite objectors citing them and this is deeply disappointing, as not only did I raise the issue with the Council, but the Neighbourhood plan should carry more weight and I'm concerned that there is not enough scrutiny. Four months into the coalition, there is a lack of progress in applying policies and fulfilling promises. Is this a sign that voters are getting a raw deal from the coalition?

Supplementary answer:

The Neighbourhood plan needs to fit into the Local Plan and it's a two way process. There are two neighbourhood plan's coming through the process this evening, Twyford and Finchampstead.

In terms of the Aborfield and Barkham neighbourhood plan, I am not fully aware. I will be meeting with Barkham Parish soon and I would like to take up the issue when I see them.

31.2 Paul Stevens has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

Can the Executive Leader confirm the determination of where the houses in the Local Plan Update are to go is a political decision - not an officer decision and that the officers are doing what the politicians want them to do?

Answer

Any decisions we make on the Local Plan must be based on evidence and have full regard to the requirements of national planning policy and guidance. Decisions we take should not and cannot, be based on 'politics'.

For clarity, it may also be helpful for me to touch briefly on the roles of councillors and officers within local government.

Councillors and officers have different but complementary roles. Both serve the public, but councillors are accountable to the electorate, whilst officers are responsible to the council as a whole.

Councillors set the policies of the council, taking into account the professional advice of officers. Officers are impartial and politically neutral. It is the role of officers to provide the best professional advice to councillors, and to implement the policies of the council once agreed.

Councillors from time to time may disagree with the best professional advice of officers. When this occurs, appropriate and clear justification must be made.

In the operation of the council, councillors must fully respect the impartiality of officers and cannot pressure or act in anyway which compromises this. In this context, politicians cannot tell officers what to recommend.

In terms of the Local Plan, decisions on the sites to be included in the new local plan will be made by councillors, but they should be made having regard to the best professional advice of officers. Officer recommendations will be evidence driven.

The fact that the Local Plan will be examined by an independent Planning Inspector shows the importance of decisions being taken objectively, being evidence-based and taking account of the best professional advice officers provide to us.

As decision makers, councillors can decide not to follow officer advice if they consider there are clear and compelling reasons not to do so. However, those reasons will be fully tested by the independent Planning Inspector when our plan is at examination, so councillors need to be clear of their basis for making decisions contrary to officer advice if that is what they choose to do.

I am sure you know we are trying to engage with government ministers to get to try to work with them to reduce government housing targets for Wokingham, currently nearly 800 new homes a year. This has been made all the more difficult by having to deal with 3 secretaries of state for levelling up, housing and communities since we took over the Administration of the Council on 19th May this year.

Supplementary question:

I understand that a group calling itself Hall Farm Developments are in negotiations with local landowners in the Hall Farm area. Will the Executive ensure that any discussion with Council officers and developers is publicly disclosed to ensure that the LPU consultation is

fully transparent and can you confirm whether or not the Hall Farm Developers Group are in contact with Wokingham Planning department?

Supplementary answer:

I'm not aware of Hall Farm Development Group but I will find out about them and we will be as open and transparent as we possibly can.

31.3 Robin Cops has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

The Arc is being funded by donations collected by the charity Arts4Wokingham as a gift to Wokingham Borough. The charity exists to advance arts and culture for the public benefit. Do you anticipate that the Council will positively support the installation of more public art in the future across the borough and particularly amongst the new housing developments, which will enable more people to have access to free art on their doorstep?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Robin. As you are aware the Borough Council is very supportive of the Arc public art project and has been working closely with Arts4Wokingham to provide a site that is easily accessible, widely visible and at the heart of our community.

The Council has an aspiration to continue to support Public Art in the borough and is keen to work with other organisations in partnership to deliver that vision. To that end the Council are working with Arts4Wokingham to reboot the Cultural Alliance as a true partnership of equals to seek creative ways to deliver public art during this time of unprecedented financial difficulties.

The current planning policy documents have listed art as a key design principle within the Strategic Development Locations and public art is integrated within the design where possible and appropriate. Examples can be found within South Wokingham and Arborfield. South Wokingham has three pieces of public art comprising sculptures within Montague Park, while the next development to the south of the railway will also contain public art. Arborfield has three life size horses by Amy Goodman. New Artworks are planned as part of the Town Centre Regeneration at The Carnival Hub and the new Neighbourhood Centre in Shinfield. There will also be opportunity within the new Arborfield District Centre to contain public art when it is developed.

The emerging Local Plan Update will set out the long-term development strategy for the borough. The preparation of the Local Plan Update will include a review of existing planning policies, which will be updated as appropriate. Public consultation of the emerging Local Plan has included policies relating to the design of new development, which encourages the provision of Public Art, particularly integration into the design of large development.

Wokingham Borough Council want to help organisations such as Arts4Wokingham as much as we can. Want arts and culture to be vibrant in the borough. I hope you will not hesitate to contact myself or Sarah if you feel you are not getting the support you need.

Supplementary question:

Will Wokingham Borough Council be able to fulfil the aspirations of its own arts and culture strategy in these challenging financial times?

Supplementary answer:

I really hope that we will, we might not be able to do as much as we would want to in the short term but definitely in the medium and long term. We want to develop a strong arts and culture policy for the borough and then implement it over the next few years.

31.4 Charlotte Haitham Taylor has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**Question:**

The landmark sculpture entitled, The Arc will capture and depict stories from the current community of Wokingham borough and share them with the future people of Wokingham borough and beyond. It is a custom work that will embed the essence of Wokingham through words and audible stories. Do you think that there is anything that Wokingham Borough Council can do, in partnership with Arts4Wokingham, who are commissioning this work, to continue to engage the public locally, and specifically to understand the impact of The Arc on communities within the borough?

Answer

Thank you for your question – Charlotte. Two of the priorities of this administration is to develop partnership working, both within the council and with external organisations and communities and enhancing the borough's arts and cultural offering.

Therefore, the council, subject to the costs and resources required, would be in favour of continuing to work in partnership with Arts4Wokingham to understand the impact of the Arc on communities in the borough, and to continue to engage the public.

We would hope that this engagement will evidence some of the documented benefits of public art elsewhere. Including, having the ability to define the individuality of a place and increase a sense of identity for its residents. As well as helping to promote the borough to attract visitors, new employees in and encourage business to invest in an area.

Demonstrating that public art can be an emblem of optimism, renewal and progress. The Borough Council under this Administration really does want to work with Arts4Wokingham and other organisations in the borough.

Supplementary Question

How could the Council use this landmark sculpture to raise the profile of Wokingham borough, bring further investment and economic prosperity into the area and do you think that there is scope for the library service and its users to be able to take advantage of this project, its location and its text to further their objectives?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, definitely scope for the library service to do that and we would be keen for you to do that. I'm sure you will have a fruitful conversation with Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Arts. Your sculpture, designed by Nicola Anthony, is going to create an identity for Wokingham. We are very committed to creating a wider culture of encouraging arts and culture in our borough. It would be nice to see people in the south of England talking of coming to see this piece of art in the same way as Anthony Gormley's Angel of the North. We will support as much as we can.

31.5 Tony Johnson asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**Question:**

Wokingham is proposing to provide two Special Education Needs schools, one at Rooks Nest Farm near California Crossroads and one at Garys Farm near Holme Green - both of which are in pleasant rural locations.

I note that the Borough has submitted an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the proposal to be considered by this Executive Meeting.

However, neither location is mentioned in that EqlA, and so their rural nature and the corresponding lack of Noise or Air Pollution has not been factored into the assessment.

Rather than make any assumptions as to where the two schools might end up after the Executive makes its decision tonight, would the Executive Member for Children's Services please explain why the locations were left out of the EqlA and what that means for the actual place(s) the schools might end up being located?

Answer

An Equalities Impact Assessment assesses the likely impact of a proposal on different groups of people. Detailed assessment of the environmental impact of a proposal would normally be done as part of the preparation for submission of a planning application.

While it is indeed true that that we need to look at issues like noise and air quality when deciding whether a site is suitable for a special school, the equalities impact assessment is more about how the principle would impact on particular characteristics (such as religious belief, race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, or age) – in other words whether there would be beneficial or negative impact on such by having more special school capacity in the borough. And it shows there would be a beneficial impact.

We don't know whether our expressions of interest will result in two special schools, one or none. We are confident that there are no environmental show-stoppers in our choice of sites, but the detailed environmental work will happen if and when we get the go-ahead for the schools.

So to answer your question directly, the reason the locations were left out is that the equalities impact assessment was assessing the impact of having more special schools on people with protected characteristics, and it doesn't have any implications with regard to the locations of the schools.

Supplementary question:

I understand your point, but I hoped for consideration of the impact of noise/chemical pollution such as would be experienced by the SEND school by the M4. If this Executive meeting, approves the schools, is there still a need to locate a SEND school by the M4 or can these two schools be adjusted in size to get an economy of scale and benefit the children through not exposing them to a locked environment or excessive levels of noise and pollution?

Supplementary answer:

The first point to note is that the process for bidding for schools, does not assure that these schools will arrive. I would like to be optimistic and hope that we will at least get one school from this process. At this point we haven't yet put in a full bid. I would prefer that we do not get ahead of ourselves.

My second point, there are lots of considerations around the size of schools and the type of SEND provision that a school will cater for. Having larger schools doesn't necessarily mean that you cater for the right needs arising from our children with SEND. The SEND school that is currently under construction is due to open next September, funded by the DfE. The DfE was satisfied that this was the right site for it. It has passed all Planning processes, whilst I know there are people who are uncomfortable because of the location, the school is funded by the DfE and run by the Maiden Erlegh Trust and not under the control of the Council.

31.6 Darren Richardson asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question

Question

The benchmarking provided in Agenda Item 39 only addresses short-term parking tariffs and not season ticket pricing. I note that the annual season ticket (parking 5 days a week) at the Bracknell Forest Council car park near Bracknell railway station is only £1,090, whereas Wokingham Borough Council is proposing to charge £2,026 for the same level of service. Has the Council done any benchmarking of the season ticket prices relative to other local councils, and is the Council willing to defer the decision on increasing season ticket pricing until such benchmarking has been published?

Answer

Thank you Darren for your question. Benchmarking has been undertaken and is set out within the report. This shows that general car parking charges are considerably lower than neighbouring local Authorities and other similar local Authorities.

As for season ticket charges you raise a good point and I have reassessed this which has resulted in a revised proposal of £1200 (Wokingham Town) and £1100 (outside of Wokingham Town. You will see this is very consistent with the benchmark figure you have referenced. Today Bracknell Forest Council have actually increased their car parking prices.

31.7 Richard Skegg asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question

Question

Question relating to Agenda Item 39.

What analysis & consultation relating to the impact on individual parishes & towns of Wokingham borough has been made when applying blanket parking charges across borough's car parks, specifically relating to the differing community uses of each car park, the variation of the communities and businesses that they serve?

Answer

Thank you Richard for your question you raise a good point. Following feedback received from the initial proposals set out in the agenda I will be making a revised proposal that addresses this very point. I will be proposing a two-tier charging system, one for Wokingham Town car parks, and a lower rate for outside of Wokingham Town.

Analysis was done by looking at other local authorities around the area. Consultation wise, we are in a situation where we have to make decisions very quickly. We did not have time to go out to consultation and the feedback that we've had since the agenda was published, we have taken that into account and therefore made revised changes which I am putting in an amended paper tonight.

Supplementary question

Having received revised proposals 33 minutes before the meeting I will confess that I am bitterly disappointed and I had hoped that sense would prevail. What support will you offer businesses/organisations affected by the new charging schedule should they be detrimental to their operation.

Supplementary answer

We unfortunately have a situation where we have up to £800,000 hole in our budget which we need to try and fill this financial year. This totals a £2.2 million budget gap overall, that increases to £4m next year. We are in a financial emergency and we need to increase car parking charges, unfortunately for the first time in five years. If they had been increased on an annual basis, such as Bracknell Forest Council tend to do, the step change would not have been so great.

31.8 Susan Dillon asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question

Question

I am a pensioner with a very tight budget living on my State Pension. I'm also a member of Woodley Photo Club that meets every Monday at 8pm in the Oakwood Centre. At the moment we can park in the Lidl car park just across the street FOC. If the Council implement evening parking fees it will cost me at the very least £4.50 for parking plus £3.00 entry fee to the club on each occasion. Where am I to find this extra money and can the Council therefore please reconsider implementing its plan for parking fees in the evening for Woodley? I would hate to give up a much-loved social (and learning) activity because I can no longer afford to go. Thank you.

Answer

Thank you Susan for your question, and have reflected on the points you and others have made. Later this evening I will be putting forward a revised proposal that reduces the proposed charge set out within this agenda to £1 for up to 1 hour and £2 for more than 1 hour between the hours of 6pm to 10pm.

I hope that you appreciate that the imperative for the Council to find ways of generating additional income from its universal services so that it can respond to the stark financial pressure, and its need to target support to the most vulnerable. I have however tried to accommodate your issue as best as possible.

31.9 Mary Nash asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question

Question

Our Photographic club meets weekly at the Oakwood Centre in Woodley, from 7:45-10pm. We are a not-for-profit organisation which offers a service for the whole community. We have kept our running costs down so members pay £30 a year plus £3 for any meeting they attend. The proposed car parking charges for evenings will significantly increase the cost to our members. Is there a way that either there could be an evening rate from 6pm - 10pm for a lower cost please, or a way that members could get a car parking pass which allowed them to park in the evening at a reduced cost? The proposed charges will affect not only our club, but many more clubs which meet at the Oakwood Centre, and the eating establishments in the Woodley Precinct. I believe people will take to parking in the streets around the centre to avoid the charges, thus congesting and making the roads more hazardous.

Answer

Thank you Mary for your question. As previously stated I have reflected on the points you and others have made. Later this evening I will be putting forward a revised proposal that reduces the proposed charge set out within this agenda to £1 for up to 1 hour and £2 for more than 1 hour between the hours of 6pm to 10pm.

I hope that you appreciate that the imperative for the Council to find ways of generating additional income from its universal services so that it can respond to the stark financial pressure, and its need to target support to the most vulnerable. I have however tried to accommodate your issue as best as possible.

31.10 Brian Fennelly asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question**Question**

Woodley Town Centre Partnership are extremely concerned about the proposed increase in Car Park charges in Woodley Town Centre. The increases, for two and four hour stays together with the introduction of charges for Evenings and Sundays are of particular concern.

You will be aware that many businesses' have had a very challenging period over the past two years and that the current cost of living crisis has meant that the hoped-for post covid bounce hasn't materialised. These proposals will undoubtedly put intolerable additional pressures on many businesses in Woodley Town Centre.

We are mindful of the financial challenges that Wokingham Borough Council are facing and understand the need to look at all areas to address these challenges effectively.

I would therefore like to know what non statutory services or projects have been reviewed with a view raising extra finance or reducing expenditure and why were they discounted instead of this proposal?

Answer

Thank you Brian for your question, which I have reflected on and will be proposing later in this meeting a revision that introduces a two-tier charging system, one for Wokingham Town car parks, and a lower rate for outside of Wokingham Town.

In addition, I have reviewed the evening charges and a change to the evening charges has been amended between the hours of 6pm to 10pm, resulting in a charge of £1 for up to 1 hour and £2 for more than 1 hour. However, I consider Sunday to be similar to a normal shopping day and the introduction of charges on these days is likely to mean that there will be a greater turn over within the car park bringing in additional footfall with more people spending money within our town centres. I believe this will be a boost to the local economy rather than long stays taking up spaces.

As you rightly point out we face unprecedented financial challenges as a result of the impact of Covid, Brexit/ a War in Europe and the general severe increase in costs on goods and services. The identified increases for our car parks will only assist with a portion of this challenge. Our Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be presented with a whole host of cost reductions and other saving options that have been worked up over many months and these will be considered in October and November. These cover all Council services including statutory and non statutory. However, I must stress that even these options

currently leave us at least £4m short of setting a balanced budget. This I hope illustrates the importance of the increased car parking proposals I have put forward.

Supplementary question

In the original proposal there was reference to car park usage increasing in 2023-34, what evidence do you have for that assertion?

Supplementary answer

Car parking has gradually increased post pandemic, we have that data from the number of car parking tickets sold. We can only forecast that there will be a gradual continued increase based on the information we currently have.

31.11 Matthew Burdett asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question

Question

As a resident now facing a 125pc increase to park my car to commute to work (around £200-£250 per year extra per working day - and at £9 now more expensive than a full days' parking at Twyford railway station) and an increase of c£50 per year to park on Sundays in Woodley town centre, please could you confirm that councillors voting for the increased parking charges at this meeting will pay for their own parking (and not expense it to the public purse) when attending council meetings in future?

Answer

Thank you Matthew for your question. As stated before I have reflected on the proposed season ticket charge set out within the agenda and will be proposing a revision. This revision will result in an annual season ticket of £1200 (Wokingham Town) and £1100 (outside of Wokingham Town).

Therefore, based on the outside Wokingham Town rate, should you travel 5 days a week and have purchased a 12-month season ticket this would only equate to a rise of £0.58 per day.

In relation to Councillors, who attend Council meetings at Shute End. They are able to apply for a parking permit, at their cost. These permits are only valid for Shute End related car parks where Council meetings are held and therefore are not valid for use outside of Shute End, such as Woodley.

32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

32.1 Gary Cowan has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

A question about the Councils Planning Enforcement Service was asked some years ago and as a direct result of the question Cllr John Kaiser authorised an independent investigation into Planning enforcement.

This was carried out by John Silvester Associates and their 43 page report, dated 4th September 2013 and can be found online.

As part of the consultation the Council carried out a public consultation and the comments from Officers, Public, Ward Members, and Parish Councillors are included in a separate

sheet which is available upon request to Democratic Services. It included a lengthy comment from the Leader of the Council.

The outcome was that Enforcement became a much improved service thanks to Cllr. John Kaisers initiative.

My question is would the Planning Department, if subjected to a similar independent public inquiry offer a better service to our residents?

Answer:

Thank you, Gary for your question. Since I have taken on this role, I have seen a professional and active planning department in operation.

Any department, however it is working, can always find a review of their services helpful. In this regard, I have asked the Director of Place & Growth to commission the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to carry out a peer review of the service. Members will be involved in this process and I am happy to suggest that you participate if you wish to do so.

32.2 Laura Blumenthal has asked the Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services the following question:

Question:

How will you measure the success of White Ribbon accreditation?

Answer:

As part of the wider Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy, we will put together a comprehensive action plan to help deliver our key objectives including White Ribbon accreditation. The action plan will include SMART outcomes, based on measures of success formulated from local discussions with local victims.

Supplementary Question:

Will this work be considered by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, it will be considered by the Community & Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee in November. This will enable cross-party Members to get involved in the shaping of this work at an early stage.

32.3 Alison Swaddle has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

Have you analysed the impact on Woodley town centre businesses, and on use of the library, before making the decision to increase parking charges and what did you conclude?

Answer

Travel habits post covid, are very different from travel pre covid, which continues to fluctuate, therefore any analysis would be very difficult to calculate.

I have however reconsidered the proposals as set out in the agenda based on considerable feedback and can confirm that the revisions, I will be presenting later in this meeting introduce a two tier system which will reduce the initial proposals for Woodley car

parks and other car parks outside of Wokingham Town, whilst still generating vital additional income for the Council in such stark financial challenging times.

Car parking charges have not been raised for nearly five years and therefore residents have benefited from these low costs over this period. As shown by the benchmarking, even the proposed increases leave us with lower charges than surrounding authorities. And it is likely that some of our neighbouring Authorities' charges will increase even higher.

The council finds itself under the severest of financial pressures as do most other local authorities and must look at all aspects to balance its books. Without these increases, essential services would need to be cut, and we are trying to find ways to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

Supplementary Question:

How can increased car parking charges lead to increased footfall. There would also be an impact of the patients of GP surgeries?

Supplementary Answer:

Sundays are currently free, so people will park there currently all day and won't move. With charges being put into place, there is then a turnover of vehicles and therefore increased footfall coming into the area.

In terms of GP surgeries, in these particular locations the same charging period remains in place. I've retained the 30 minute stay in Woodley.

32.4 Andy Croy has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

The proposed changes to the off-street charging fees adopt a 'one-size fits all' approach to the new fees.

Woodley and Wokingham town centres are very different centres and the proposed fees will have very different impacts on local residents and the local community. Will the Executive Member meet with me so I can explain these differences and to discuss how a more bespoke approach would be more suitable?

Answer

Thank you for your question Andy you raise a good point. Following feedback received from the initial proposals set out in the agenda I will be making a revised proposal that addresses this very point. I will be proposing a two-tier charging system, one for Wokingham Town car parks, and a lower rate for outside of Wokingham Town.

In addition, I have reviewed the evening charges and propose to change the evening charges to introduce a reduced charge from the original proposal of £1 for up to 1 hour and £2 for more than 1 hour between the hours of 6pm to 10pm.

Supplementary Question:

Will the decision contain flexibility to contain further revisions should they be needed?

Supplementary Answer:

Subject to agreement, these proposals will be implemented in January 2023, There would be an opportunity to further review after that date.

32.5 Charles Margetts has asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

The Council is proposing to increase car parking charges across the borough, to charge for parking in the evenings, Sundays and bank holidays in an attempt to close a budget gap. Officers have advised me the reason for the budget gap is use of car parks has still not returned to pre covid levels. Can you advise if any other options were considered to close this budget gap instead of raising car park charges and what the other options were?

Answer:

Thank you for your question Charles, although the car parking budget as a whole is considerably short of its income target this is not representative of a stark decline in patronage of our general off street car parks as it includes other factors such as Park and Rides and staff car parking. The current estimate of upturn in off street car parking, not including Park and Rides, has improved since the pandemic and is currently in the region of 90%.

Park and Rides continue to suffer, with only Mere oak operational which is around 25% of pre-pandemic levels and Winnersh Triangle currently under construction. Coppid Beech is not yet open but all have business rates and other running costs.

Car parking charges have not been raised for nearly 5 years and therefore residents have benefited from these low costs over this period. As shown by the benchmarking, even the proposed increases leave us with lower charges than surrounding authorities.

And it is likely that some of our neighbouring Authorities' charges will increase even higher, Bracknell Forest have done that today. The council now finds itself in time of financial pressure and is looking at all aspects on how to recover from this situation. Without these increases, essential services would need to be cut, and we are trying to find ways to protect the most vulnerable in our community.

The identified increases for our car parks will only assist with a portion of this deficit and we are continuing to look for additional savings across all non statutory areas. Overview and Scrutiny will be presented with a whole host of cost reductions and other saving options that have been worked up over many months and these will be considered in October and November.

These cover all Council services including statutory and non statutory. However, I must stress that even these options currently leave us at least £4m short of setting a balanced budget.

This I hope illustrates the importance of the increased car parking proposals I have put forward. Any ideas you have to help resolve our budget challenges will be gratefully appreciated and please can you feed these into the budget scrutiny process.

Supplementary Question:

Will you commit to publishing the figures behind this, the business case?

Supplementary Answer:

I am happy to provide you with a summary of the workings.

32.6 Jackie Rance has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question

If, as your leader suggested in the Woodley and Earley chronicle, food recycling may be adversely impacted by the drop of free caddy liners how do you intend to deliver on the £350k increase in the food recycling target which is in the budget?

Answer

As a point of clarification, the £350k saving target includes both food waste and dry recycling material. In order to realise these savings this year there have been a number of targeted communications to boost food waste and dry recycling and minimise overall waste across the borough. Current forecasts indicate these savings are likely to be made.

33. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER

The Executive noted that a large number of complaints had been made to the Council about anti-social vehicle use in Council owned car parks, and also on privately owned land, such as supermarket car parks. The activity featured engine revving, wheel spinning, aggressive driving, noise from horns and music equipment. It was noted that expenditure was needed for signage.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) authorised the Corporate Director for Place and Growth to proceed with the implementation of the PSPO as detailed in Appendix 1 of the agenda papers and delegate authorised officers to enforce the conditions of the PSPO including issuing Fixed Penalty Notices for breaches of these in appropriate cases; and
- 2) authorised the Head of Legal Services to commence prosecution proceedings in relation to breaches of conditions in the PSPO in appropriate cases.

34. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, WOKINGHAM RESPONSE TO NATIONAL STRATEGY AND STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS (NSE)

The Executive considered a report which sought approval for the development of a borough wide Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services reported that this preventative work was crucial. She stated that it had been just over a year since the murder of Sabina Nessa. Violence outside the home was far too prevalent. The white ribbon work provided a vehicle for engaging men and promoting the message that preventing violence and misogyny was everyone's responsibility.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for her work and her personal commitment to this work. The Executive agreed that everyone had a responsibility to support this work.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved:

1. the development of a borough wide Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy outlining the Council's commitment to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls.

2. development of an action plan and all the necessary requirements to become an accredited White Ribbon organisation.
3. the in-year supplementary estimate of £600 required to fund White Ribbon Accreditation this financial year.

35. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT 21-22

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the internal health and safety performance for 2021-22; and noted and agreed the priorities in the report described under Corporate Health and Safety Priorities for 2021-22 which will inform the current municipal year 2022-23.

36. LOCAL BUS SERVICES

The Executive noted that existing bus contracts had come to their natural end. The contracts had to be retendered if local bus services, which were not commercially sustainable, were to continue to be provided, financially supported by the Council.

It was confirmed that route 129 would be included in this retendering work.

It was noted that an Equality Impact assessment would be included in a future report.

The Executive noted that one million bus journeys took place each year, this presented a significant number of residents using the bus services, this was a significant service that should be retained.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) gave approval for officers to go out to tender for local bus services, serving Wokingham Town and the surrounding villages, to the villages which lie to the South of the M4, for additional evening and Sunday journeys to Arborfield and for services to the Woodley and Earley areas.
- 2) gave approval to delegate the award of the winning tender to the Director of Place and Growth assuming the winning tender meets the allocated budget and service specification.

37. PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE NUMBER OF SUPPLIED BLUE REFUSE BAGS TO PROPERTIES IN THE BOROUGH FROM FEBRUARY 2023

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that the budget provision made by the previous Administration for blue refuse bags had assumed that costs would not increase. As costs had risen, this left no alternative but to reduce the number of bags provided.

It was noted that 57% of waste could be recycled elsewhere and this change would encourage residents to utilise other recycling facilities offered by the Council.

It was reported that a £2.2million deficit had been inherited from the previous Administration and as a result, services needed to fit within this reduced expenditure.

The Executive agreed that provision for larger families needed to be kept under review.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the proposed change of policy from supplying 80 blue bags for refuse to 54 blue bags for refuse per annum to all properties (to include the provision to keep larger households under review).

38. CEASING THE SUPPLY OF SINGLE USE PLASTIC FOOD CADDY LINERS

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that in 2019, the food waste service was implemented with a starter pack of 100 caddy liners for one year. Although no budget was set aside, this supply continued in 2020, 2021 and 2022 as income generated by the wider service was able to accommodate this spend, however due to financial pressures this was no longer financially viable.

In June 2022, the Executive had been briefed that caddy liners had been depleted and there was no budget provision made to continue to purchase these.

Food waste recycling rates would continue to be monitored.

The Executive noted that the Council had declared a climate emergency and ceasing the use of these single plastic use caddy liners was another step towards working towards being carbon free.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to cease the supply of caddy liners, given that alternatives were available.

39. TWYFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN - REGULATION 16 CONSULTATION AND FUTURE EXAMINATION

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) approved a 6-week consultation on the draft Twyford Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix A of the agenda papers); and
- 2) agreed to appoint an examiner to independently examine the draft Twyford 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 Local Plan.

40. FINCHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - REGULATION 16 CONSULTATION AND FUTURE EXAMINATION

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) approved a 6 week consultation on the draft Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan; and
- 2) agreed to appoint an examiner to independently examine the draft Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development 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 Local Plan.

41. OFF STREET CAR PARK CHARGES

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways reported that councils across the Country were facing the worst economic pressures that had ever been faced, with some facing the prospect of bankruptcy. As examples, Slough and Thurrock were

facing severe pressures across all their services, with government intervention looming large.

The Council was keen to protect the most vulnerable in the community, but at the same time ensure the future financial viability of the Council. Currently, a £2.2m deficit was forecast. Taking funding from reserves was not an option, as reserves were now low.

The Executive noted that a number of other local authorities were currently considering changes to their car parking charges, with Bracknell Forest increasing their charges year on year. Wokingham Borough Council had not increased off street car parking charges since 2018, unlike many other local authorities locally.

Several options had been modelled, the lower charging model had been chosen. Given the crisis that councils faced in terms of their financial situation, this action was necessary and difficult decisions like this one, lay ahead.

The Executive Member for Finance agreed that the Council faced a very difficult financial future and difficult decisions would need to be taken to protect vulnerable people. She noted that extra funding to support low income families over the summer months in the form of free school meals had already been committed.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways for the tremendous work he had committed to bring forward these proposals. He also thanked the residents who had written to Councillors to make their views very clear. The Council had taken these on board and listened carefully to resident's views.

The Chair asked the Executive to consider the recommendations in the amended report which has been circulated as a supplementary paper.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to increase the parking charges as detailed in the amended report, (which included a schedule of revisions on page 11) circulated and published as a supplementary paper.

42. CARNIVAL HUB PUBLIC REALM ART INSTALLATION

Councillor Sarah Kerr declared a non-registrable interest, as a trustee of Arts4Wokingham. She left the room for the entirety of the item and did not participate in the vote.

The Chair expressed a special thank you to Nicola Anthony who was responsible for the design of the sculptural artwork. He also thanked Arts4Wokingham for their work on this project. The artwork would support mental health and wellbeing and would provide a huge source of civic pride.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) approved the Council taking a loan of the public artwork, known as 'the Arc', on the terms detailed within the report.
- 2) noted the termination and reinstatement provisions within the terms detailed in the report.

- 3) noted the financial implications for the Council of the agreement, and that the costs for insurance and maintenance will be included in the Carnival Hub estates management budget.
- 4) delegated authority to the Director of Assets and Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development, to implement the agreement.

43. RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDANCE

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the Council's Risk Management Policy and Guidance with the changes described in the Executive Summary of the report as recommended by the Audit Committee.

44. ENERGY CONTRACT PROCUREMENT

This report was withdrawn. The Chair communicated a statement prepared by officers which provided reasons for the withdrawal of this report.

'Last week the Government announced a package of measures through the Energy Bill including a freeze cap on energy costs which includes local authority buildings. This package covers a period from 1st October 2022 through to 1st April 2023. We are assessing the impact of these measures on our energy costs, which we will hope will be positive in generating savings on our ever increasing costs.

In light of this policy announcement, and with uncertainty as to what aid the Government may offer after this time frame, we need further time to consider the right course of action regarding procurement of our future energy supplies. We have therefore withdrawn the paper due to be considered by Executive tonight on energy contract procurement and subsequently from consideration by Council in October.

Our contract with our existing supplier remains in place and consideration of future energy supplies will be brought back to Executive and Council in due course next year.'

45. SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITY SUFFICIENCY AND SAFETY VALVE PROGRAMMES

The Executive Member for Children's Services reported that currently children were having to travel outside of the local area for special school places. Further, action was required to reduce spend on the High Needs Block budget and on home to school transport. This bid for funding would address all of these issues, by delivery of high quality, local, cost effective specialist provision. She thanked Children's Services officers for all their work on this.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) approved the submission of a proposal by the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the lead member for Children's Services to the DfE for two new Special Free Schools in the borough in October 2022;
- 2) supported the recommendation to utilise two sites (part of Rooks Nest Farm, Barkham and part of Grays Farm, south of Wokingham) owned by the Council for the provision of two new Special Free Schools and note that the disposal of these sites would be subject to a further Executive decision;

- 3) noted the ongoing preparatory work for participation in the national “Safety Valve” intervention programme from September 2022.
- 4) noted the development work in progress for further projects to increase special needs provision in the borough.

46. COMMISSIONED SERVICES FOR THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CARERS

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services reported that carers were incredibly important, it was crucial that the Council supported them and recognised the valuable work they carried out each day.

The Executive noted that often carers were women and/or on low incomes and as a result this work to support carers was much needed.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) noted and approved the planned procurement of the carers service at a total value of £234,000 per annum for a period of up to 4 years, and
- 2) delegates award post-procurement to the Director of Adult Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services.

47. REPROCUREMENT OF BERKSHIRE COMMUNITY EQUIPMENT SERVICE

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services reported that it was key to keep people safe and to help them to stay safe.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) approved the attached Business Case to undertake a joint procurement exercise of Berkshire Community Equipment Service for Wokingham in partnership with West Berkshire, Reading, Bracknell Forest, Slough, the Royal Borough Windsor and Maidenhead Local Authorities and the NHS CCGs in Berkshire East and Berkshire West. West Berkshire Council will be the lead authority.

Details of the current spend and available budget can be found in Part 2 of the Executive Report (Financial Information).

- 2) delegated authority to the Directors of Adult Services and Children Services in consultation with the Lead Members for Adults and Children’s Services to utilise the budget for this service and to award the contract in conjunction with the other authorities to the preferred supplier.

.....

Sarah Kerr, Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services made the following statement:

“I wanted to make a public statement in this meeting, when I left the meeting earlier as I had to be absent for an item on the agenda for which I had a conflict of interest. You may have heard a man shout some verbal abuse at me, which was actually quite nasty. I first want to thank publicly Councillor Jim Frewin for calling it out, who subsequently stormed off. It made me quite upset and the irony being that I had presented this evening a report

about abuse. I think it is unacceptable, we are carrying out our role and we should be able to come to our place of work and do our job without abuse. It is completely unacceptable, we are making some very tough decisions and we do not take this lightly. If we only made populist, easy decisions, we would be bankrupt as a Council and we would not be able to deliver anything other than statutory services. I hope this Council takes action against members of the public who abuse officers and Members in this way, it is unacceptable.”

The Chair thanked Sarah Kerr and expressed his sadness that this had taken place this evening, it was wholly unacceptable for someone who had attended an open public meeting to abuse one of the councillors in this way, particularly a female councillor. It was disgraceful and action would be taken.

This page is intentionally left blank