

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 29 JUNE 2023 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.10 PM**

Executive Members Present

Councillors: Prue Bray (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Apologies:

Councillors Stephen Conway, David Hare and Clive Jones.

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 21 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The minutes of the meeting of the extraordinary Executive held on 20 April 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to a typographical error being corrected in 102.3.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

I am very pleased to be able to announce that last Friday the Council won two Municipal Journal (MJ) achievement awards. One for innovation and delivering sustainability and social value and the other one for the best social housing initiative. I would like to congratulate all the officers who have had anything to do with either of the projects and also to those officers who were shortlisted for two other awards but did not win. We were the only Council who won two awards and we should be justifiably proud of what we have achieved. Thank you to everybody and congratulations.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

4.1 Chas Hockin asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

Can the Council explain what has happened to all the money taken incorrectly by car parking machines on Bank Holidays? Will it be refunded to users (who can easily be traced) and what plans do the council have to ensure that if charges are made on Bank Holidays in the future the machines will not take them?

Answer

Thank you for your question, Chas. All our car park ticket machines are programmed not to charge on Bank Holidays where charges do not apply.

For any additional special Bank Holidays such as the Golden Jubilee and the Kings Coronation, the council installed notification signs at each car park ticket machine advising that during these special days, charges did not apply. Anyone who did pay on these days were advised no refunds would be offered.

From 3rd July 2023, charges will be made on Bank Holidays and the machines will be programmed for the applicable fees.

Supplementary Question

What has happened to all the money taken incorrectly by car parking machines?

Answer

The money will have gone into car parking income.

4.2 Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question: Question

At the May full Council meeting leaders past and present strongly emphasised a compassionate council and compassionate budget yet in the budget Wokingham introduced fees for families who suffer the death of a baby, infant or child. Services that were previously free. Will the Executive show some compassion for families in these circumstances and revert these services to being free of charge?

Answer

Thank you for the question – I understand your concern on this sensitive subject, but just to be clear, fees have NOT been introduced for families who suffer the death of a child. Funeral fees for children under 18 years of age are directly claimed by undertakers and paid from the central government Children’s Funeral Fund. This is funding provided to cover the funeral costs in the event of a death of a child, so that families do not have to pay.

What was introduced by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) in May, was a fee that is claimed from this Children’s Funeral Fund, to cover Wokingham Borough Council’s costs. This could include coroner services and registering the death. This is funding that has always been available for WBC to claim, but we have not done so until now. However, be reassured that this will have no impact on families who find themselves in these terrible circumstances – and for them, the services are still free of charge.

Supplementary Question

Can something be done on how this is communicated, in terms of the fee not being charged to families.

Answer

Yes, we can look at this.

5. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

5.1 Rebecca Margetts has asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

Residents are concerned about the proposal to build two Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) schools at Rooks Nest. The only bus service to this area is infrequent and there is no pavement or cycleway so the only way to get there for staff and pupils will be to drive. This proposal is contrary to the Council’s own aims to reduce carbon

emissions and promote active travel. What is the administration doing to address these concerns?

Answer:

In recommending locating the two schools on the same site a lot of consideration has been given to carbon emission reduction.

During the construction stage there are a lot of efficiencies the contractors can make, particularly in getting plant and materials on to one site instead of two.

Needing only one access road will lead to significant reductions in materials and minimise costs. Similarly, opportunities will be explored to share infrastructure particularly, parking, playing fields and utilities, similarly reducing the overall carbon footprint.

We have secured a commitment from the Department for Education (DfE) that the schools will be Net Zero Carbon in operation and be climate resilient.

We will be incorporating enhanced landscaping options and additional tree planting in the design.

As with every school, a Travel Plan promoting sustainable travel will be required as part of planning, and we will be promoting walking and cycling to staff and pupils. Having the schools co-located will also provide the greatest opportunity to optimise home to school transport taxi or minibus journeys. But these young people are some of the most vulnerable in our communities and therefore, it is unlikely that either public transport, cycling or walking to school would be a viable option for them. However, the very fact that the schools are in the Borough will by itself reduce the distances travelled and thus reduce carbon emissions.

Having said all that, I do want to make two other points. If you refer to the agenda you will see that these schools will only take up a small part of Rooks Nest. And secondly, the Conservative group – of which you are a member – included Rooks Nest as a site for 270 houses in the Local Plan update. Which I think would worry residents a lot more than the two SEND schools which we are proposing.

Supplementary Question

You've talked about Active Travel for schools, I don't think that addresses the large number of staff who will be required to travel to the two schools. How will these staff travel to the schools? with the exception of staff living in Finchampstead it would seem that the only option would be to drive.

Answer

The report sets out that there is a possibility of locating a bus stop on the road close to the schools. A meeting with local ward councillors will also be arranged to discuss any concerns in the coming weeks.

5.2 Charles Margetts has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question

In January, Planning permission was granted for five new houses at 6 Johnson Drive. The site, in a rural area of Finchampstead, had been the subject of multiple planning applications and appeals over the past 20 years. At the last appeal, the Planning Inspector

described the application as “unsustainable”. How could this neighbourhood plan have helped stop this sort of application, and future applications like it?

Answer

In short the answer is no, it couldn't have.

Neighbourhood plans add an additional layer of planning policy to help reflect local circumstance and further guide the nature and quality of development in an area. They are therefore an opportunity to positively influence development based on the priorities of local communities, rather than a mechanism to try to stop development. A neighbourhood plan cannot for example, promote less development than that identified in the adopted local plan for the locality covered by the plan.

In the case of Finchampstead, the parish council and local volunteers have worked hard to prepare the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan (FNDP) which is now at an advanced stage. If recommendations in the Executive item are accepted, the FNDP will proceed to referendum in September 2023 and if supported by the local community through that referendum, will thereafter be adopted as part of the development plan.

The FNDP includes policies to influence development in the parish over the next 15 years.

The plan includes a policy on infill, small plot development and development of private residential gardens. This policy adds additional considerations and requirements for proposals like that granted at Johnson Drive but does not try to prevent this type of development when located within development limits.

Of course, the FNDP also includes other policies such as a Key Local Gap, Green Wedge, Local Green Space policies/designations and those relating to requirements for 10% biodiversity net gain. Once adopted, those policies will add to the quality of future development in Finchampstead Parish by providing an additional layer of planning policy that decision takers will consider when determining applications.

Supplementary Question

I know local volunteers including Councillor David Cornish, worked very hard on this Plan for several years and I commend them for their efforts. In the case of 6 Johnson Drive it's not included in the Finchampstead neighbourhood plan area it is in the countryside but nevertheless in this case officers recommended approval of this application despite being previously assessed as being unsustainable by the Planning Inspector. In this current climate, is it not the case that any protection a neighbourhood plan can offer against unsustainable development is sadly very limited?

Answer

As the answer gave you, the protection is limited. One thing that you could do to help the situation is to prod your government to respond on the NPPF proposals that were consulted on from December until March and that we are able to have inclusion of the overprovision of nearly 2000 homes in this area.

As you know the reason, we don't have a five year land supply at the moment, is because we have built too many houses too early. This has eaten up all of the five year land supply that was there. I would ask you to lobby your government to put their proposals together.

That would be the greatest response and protection we could give and regarding the Local Plan we will be moving forward this year.

6. CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP POLICY

The Executive Member for Finance reported that the policy would introduce clear guidance, governance and processes for officers to follow in order to market, value and contract sponsorship agreements. As the council considered wider policies such as in respect of the climate emergency and/or pay arrangements, amendments would be considered to ensure that the approach aligned to this work. The policy would ensure consistency and ensure that any potential sponsors aligned with the Council's policies and values.

RESOLVED that the Executive adopted the Corporate Sponsorship Policy to enable the Council to provide a support structure and governance for where these opportunities existed, to allow services to explore new revenue streams through sponsorship agreements and in certain circumstances to assist local business to market their services.

7. FINCHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan reported that he was pleased to see this Neighbourhood Plan coming forward to the Executive. A tremendous amount of work had been carried out by volunteers to get it to this stage. He clarified that the report the report inconsistently made reference to '10 local green spaces' and '8 local greenspaces'. The correct figure was actually 9 local green spaces, this is the number that the Examiner considered were justified.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Accepted the modifications recommended by the Independent Examination into the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (as set out in Enclosure 1) and for the modified plan to proceed to referendum;
- 2) Agreed that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, as modified in accordance with the recommendations of the Examiner, meets the basic conditions and complies with the provisions of Paragraph 8 (1) (a) (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Localism Act 2011);
- 3) Agreed to publish the 'Decision Statement' as set out at Enclosure 2 of this report;
- 4) Authorised the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, to agree minor factual and consequential modifications necessary to the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, the Decision Statement, and other supporting documents prior to the referendum;
- 5) Agreed the referendum be organised and conducted in the Finchampstead neighbourhood area.

8. REVENUE MONITORING 2022-23 - OUTTURN

The Executive Member for Finance reported that the revenue budget monitoring report presented the final outturn of the last financial year and was a good news story. In the face of rising inflation and unpredicted problems, numerous savings and changes were made to maintain service delivery and to keep the Council solvent.

To add context, the predicted overspend of the revenue budget in quarter one was £2.23 million last year, but with the work of officers, this was turned around by making in-year savings, resulting in an £83,000 underspend by the end of the year.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) noted the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 2) agreed the General Fund carry forward requests of £317k as set out in Appendix B to the report. This request is lower than in the previous year where carry forwards were £667k.
- 3) noted the general fund balance as at 31 March 2023 is c£9.1m, this balance remains in line with the reasonable level of balances set out in the general fund reserves policy statement as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

9. CAPITAL OUTTURN 2022/23

The Executive Member for Finance reported that the number of capital projects that could be completed this year would be limited given the Council's difficult budget position. The report was overall a good news story as whilst projects were removed, rescheduled or reshaped, the Council was still able to deliver some capital projects as it was recognised that this work was needed for the benefit of residents.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) noted the outturn position of the capital programme for 2022/23 as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in appendix A;
- 2) approved and noted the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B.
- 3) noted and approved the Quarter 4 budget adjustments to the 2022/23 capital programme which include;
 - a) An additional £63,081 budget for fit out costs for Ryeish Green Learning Disability Accommodation. This is funded in full by a ring-fenced contribution from NHS Berkshire.
 - b) An additional £77,000 budget for works on Dinton Barn is required to meet the latest costs of the project following a recent procurement tender process. This is funded in full from the SANG maintenance reserve.
 - c) An additional £121,607 budget towards Winnersh Farm SEN School. This is funded in full from Reading Borough Council and is a contribution towards abnormal costs identified in the project.
- 4) approved the capital funding and the expenditure budget of £956,000 for the purchase of four properties as part of the single homelessness accommodation programme (SHAP).

This will be funded from S106 developer contributions (£150,000), ringfenced grant (£359,408) and the remainder from HRA borrowing (£446,592).

10. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services reported that she was pleased to be bringing this for Executive consideration. The final strategy would be prepared for the autumn. The strategy would bring consistency, whilst there were pockets of excellence, there also existed instances where customer service could be improved. This strategy would create Council wide ownership of customer service and the customer experience. She thanked Jackie Whitney for her tremendous work on this strategy. The team had worked hard to produce a jargon free strategy.

Executive members welcomed the focus of the strategy set out on page 180 of the report. It was noted that this was the first Council's Customer Excellence strategy.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the draft Customer Experience strategy, for onward public consultation.

11. WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL TREE STRATEGY

The Executive Member for the Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that minor changes had been made to the strategy since the last time the Executive had considered it. Much work had been invested in the strategy, which would provide a unified approach to the borough's management of trees.

Executive Members thanked officers for the work that had gone into developing this strategy and to the residents and organisations who had fed into the consultation process. It was noted that that whilst the focus on planting trees was much welcomed, maintaining these trees and protecting their survival was also paramount. It was noted that the strategy would play an important role in informing the environmental element of the Local Plan.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the adoption of the Wokingham Borough Council Tree Strategy.

12. DEVELOPMENT OF TWO NEW WOKINGHAM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED SCHOOLS

The Executive Member for Children's Services made the following points:

- The timetable on page 298 of the report set out that following a successful bid in the Spring for the development of these schools, the Department for Education (DfE) initiated a bidding process for Trusts to run these schools. 31 August was the deadline for the expressions of interest for running the schools. A decision on the location of the schools was required, in order for this work to progress as outlined in this timetable.
- Page 301 set out plans for reducing carbon, the DfE had confirmed that all Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND) schools would embed net zero carbon operationing and climate resilience and that all DfE SEND schools would be fitted with sprinklers. The Executive welcomed this and would encourage the aspiration that ALL schools be built in this way.
- The report included an analysis of the impact of delivering these two new schools in terms of the High Needs block funding and to the Home to School Transport budget. The schools would have a substantial positive impact on both.

- The Executive noted that the schools would occupy one corner of the Rooks Nest site. (Field 1, less than a quarter of the site). The use of the rest of the site had not been confirmed but woodland extensions, farming or solar farming were under consideration.
- The Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan advised that recommendation 7 of the report confirmed that the whole of the Rooks Nest site would not be used for residential use and that the previous promotion of the site for residential development would be withdrawn from the Local Plan Update process.
- It was noted that the number of pupils at the two SEND schools was much smaller than an average non SEND school, which was likely to reduce any issues around traffic and congestion around the site.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Confirmed support for the development and provision of **two** new Special Educational Needs School at Rooks Nest Farm in Finchampstead (as per the Officer's recommendation having reviewed this site against all available sites in the Council's ownership)
- 2) Gave delegated authority to the Executive Member for Children's Services to approve the lease of these sites to the DfE for use as a Special Educational Needs school on their model Heads of Terms (a copy is in **Appendix A**) and delegated, under 5.4.3 [which applies to all delegations to officers and individual members below] powers to the Director of Resources and Assets, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, to complete the lease.
- 3) Approved a supplementary estimate of £1.5m for the infrastructure and abnormal costs associated with the delivery of the two new SEND schools. Working with the DfE, the Council will aim to minimise these costs where possible. Any costs will be funded from the approved capital contingency budget.
- 4) Subject to the DfE approval of the Council's bid to self-deliver the free school capital projects, give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Children's Services, to approve the capital development of both schools (5.1.9.2) (b) re Virements over £500k) and the procurement and awarding of the construction works through a competitive procurement process, details to be presented and approved by the Strategic Procurement Board (SPB).
- 5) Give delegated authority to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Children's Services, to run the presumption exercise (along with the DfE) to select and enter into leases with a Trust (or Trusts) to manage both schools.
- 6) Give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Finance, to approve the infrastructure costs and abnormal costs (not funded by the DfE) when these are known.
- 7) agreed that the whole of the Rooks Nest Farm site, which has previously been promoted to the Local Plan Update for residential use with an estimated

residential land value of £19.25M, will now not be used for residential use, with the residential land value estimation to be foregone and that the previous promotion of the site for residential development will be withdrawn from the Local Plan Update process.

13. ST CRISPIN'S LEISURE CENTRE CONSULTATION

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that there had been a distinct fall in the use of this leisure facility since the onset of the pandemic. This had prompted a review of usage and future options. It was noted that the opening of the Carnival hub facility had taken some usage away from St Crispin's. An eight week consultation was proposed.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved a public consultation on the future of St Crispin's Leisure Centre, including an option of closing the leisure centre, and considering all potential options for the future use of the site. Note that a report will be brought back to Executive following the consultation recommending the next steps.

14. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PURCHASE AND DISTRIBUTION OF WHEELED BINS IN THE BOROUGH

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that the Procurement Board had supported an open tender approach.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the proposed procurement strategy of proceeding to 'open tender' to purchase and distribute wheeled bins in the borough.

15. TERM MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS FOR REACTIVE & PLANNED MECHANICAL WORKS

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Approved the undertaking of a competitive tender process for a new term maintenance contract(s) for Reactive and Planned Mechanical Works;
- 2) Delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets to implement the recommended procurement approach.

16. TOUTLEY EAST DEVELOPMENT - RESIDENTIAL DELIVERY MODEL

The Deputy Leader reported that this item was before the Executive for consideration as a result of the Council no longer being able to afford the original proposal for a new Care Home. The recommendations aimed for a development which was as close as possible to net carbon zero, to maximise social housing and to create an income stream for the Council.

The Executive noted that the Government's Climate Change Committee report had just been published and highlighted that buildings were one of the worst performing areas in terms of achieving net carbon zero, to reduce carbon overall. This should therefore be a significant area of focus for this development. In terms of residential homes, whilst there was an upfront capital cost, the long term benefits and savings would generally outweigh the initial cost. It was also noted that carbon net zero was included in the aspirations and requirements of the Local Plan.

The Executive noted that visibility at the exit of the site onto Twyford Road was limited and residents had expressed concern. It was confirmed that the details of this Highway junction

required Planning approval and so there was still work and scope for any issues to be addressed.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Agreed to the cessation of the construction of a care home as part of the Toutley East strategic masterplan as previously approved, whilst the viability of alternative delivery models for the care home are explored.
- 2) Approved the development of the land for residential including the provisions for affordable housing and Community Infrastructure Levy as set out in the report
- 3) Noted that further market testing would be undertaken on the costs and values of energy efficient residential development in excess of current policy and building regulations, up to and including Net Zero Carbon design, to input into the delivery model decision.
- 4) Noted the risks and opportunities of the delivery options for the residential development of the land and approved that further market testing would be undertaken on the Disposal and Joint Venture models to ascertain Value for Money and risk exposure;
- 5) Delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement the programme for the development of the Toutley East site, including a value for money decision on alternative delivery models for the care home and residential delivery models, taking into account the findings of the further market testing and the Council's climate commitments and targets within the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

17. CORPORATE BUILDING CLEANING SERVICES

The Executive Member for Finance reported that this contract would run from April 2024.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed that a new contract be procured for cleaning services via competitive procurement process.

18. LOCAL SUFFICIENCY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

The Executive agreed the following Motion:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that this item involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

The Executive:

RESOLVED that the Local Sufficiency for Children in Care plan be approved as set out in the report.