

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE COUNCIL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 21 MARCH 2024 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.55 PM**

Members Present

Councillors: Beth Rowland (Mayor), Adrian Mather (Deputy Mayor), Jane Ainslie, Sam Akhtar, Keith Baker, Rachel Bishop-Firth, Laura Blumenthal, Prue Bray, Rachel Burgess, Anne Chadwick, Stephen Conway, David Cornish, Andy Croy, Phil Cunningham, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Paul Fishwick, Catherine Glover, Andrew Gray (from 9.15pm), David Hare, Peter Harper, Pauline Helliar-Symons, Graham Howe, Chris Johnson, Clive Jones, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, Sarah Kerr, Abdul Loyes, Morag Malvern, Charles Margetts, Rebecca Margetts, Andrew Mickleburgh, Jordan Montgomery, Stuart Munro, Alistair Neal, Stephen Newton, Ian Pittock, Jackie Rance, Ian Shenton, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Caroline Smith, Mike Smith, Wayne Smith, Bill Soane, Alison Swaddle, Marie-Louise Weighill and Shahid Younis

117. Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Gary Cowan, David Davies, John Halsall and Tony Skuse.

Councillor Andrew Gray submitted apologies for lateness.

118. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 22 February 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

119. Declarations of Interest

A declaration of interest was submitted from the following -

Councillor Stephen Conway declared a Personal Interest in Item 129 Constitution Update, on the grounds that it referred to the establishment of a Shareholder Committee and he was a Non Executive Director of Loddon Homes Limited and WBC Holdings Limited.

Councillor Prue Bray declared a Personal Interest in Item 129 Constitution Update, on the grounds that it referred to the establishment of a Shareholder Committee and she was a Non Executive Director of Berry Brook Homes Limited and Wokingham Housing Limited.

Councillor David Cornish declared a Personal Interest in Item 129 Constitution Update, on the grounds that it referred to the establishment of a Shareholder Committee and he was a Non Executive Director of Loddon Homes Limited and Wokingham Housing Limited.

120. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Members of the Crown Court competition which she had attended.

Councillor Stephen Conway indicated that a number of Members would be not be seeking re-election - Keith Baker, Laura Blumenthal, Gary Cowan, Peter Dennis, Lindsay Ferris, John Halsall, Pauline Helliard Symons, Graham Howe, Sarah Kerr, Clive Jones, Morag Malvern, Ian Pittock and Ian Shenton. He thanked them for the work that they had carried out on the Council and on behalf of residents.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen thanked all the retiring Members for their hard work.

Councillor Andy Croy indicated that all of the Labour Group Members would be seeking re-election.

121. Public Question Time

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

121.1 Adrian Betteridge asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

The new footbridge over the railway in Wokingham Town will shortly be open and a big improvement over the preceding structure for the able-bodied. It's unacceptable that Network Rail refused to make the bridge accessible for all, but Wokingham Borough Council did indicate that it would be willing to address this. Can you give an indication as to when and how this will happen?

Answer

Wokingham Borough Council officers have been in contact with Network Rail since the beginning of their project, including letters from myself during 2022 and early in 2023 to their Regional Director and despite us continuing to insist on ramps, they have disappointingly decided that they did not need to provide these as part of their project.

We are pleased, however, that Network Rail have accommodated a number of our requirements including the provision of the wide bridge deck to accommodate all users including wheelchairs and cyclists and incorporate within their design the likely removal of the steps in the future enabling it to be relatively straight forward to attach a ramp at a later date.

We have completed feasibility work to identify a viable solution as the ramp required will need to be a significant structure. This is because a gentle slope is necessary to ensure access for all. Although this feasibility shows that a ramp is possible, the amount of work required to design this, and the significant costs involved meant that we could not design and pay for the additional work within the short timescales of the Network Rail project.

We do have funding allocated in the MTFP which was approved last month, to carry out further feasibility work on the ramps and a route to Molly Millars Lane next financial year and then detailed design in 2025/26. However, we cannot yet confirm how we will fund the construction of the ramps which is likely to require several million pounds.

Supplementary Question:

The bridge has the potential to provide safe routes for walking and cycling between the Town Centre and the Molly Millar's businesses, and areas as far afield as Evendons, Barkham, Arborfield, and Finchampstead, but currently it is only accessible from the Barkham Road side. What plans are there to make it accessible from the south?

Supplementary Answer:

We have allocated funding for 2024/25 to carry out work to identify a route to the south from the end of the ramps to Molly Millars Lane where there is a toucan crossing, which we installed in the summer of 2023.

121.2 Erin Gallagher asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:**Question**

Currently our hard-working waste collection teams collect multiple bin bags into a single container bin then go to the truck, considering wheelie bins completely remove this operational process and makes things more inefficient how will this save money?

Answer

The first component of the savings comes from the £350,000 per year that we have been spending on single use blue plastic bags, which will not be needed. The second component of the savings comes from the diversion of recyclable waste from the blue bags to green recycling bags, food waste caddies and recycling banks. The third component of the savings comes from staffing efficiencies made by moving to this collection system.

At present a compositional analysis of blue bags tells us that almost 60% of the waste in those bags could have been recycled. Among the 85% of councils that have already made this change, their experience is that residents become more conscious of the need to separate recyclables, so that recycling rates increase and residual tonnage falls. As disposing of residual waste can cost up to £100 per tonne more than recyclables, this will generate significant savings in disposal costs.

This Council can no longer afford the luxury of spending £1 million per year more than we need to on waste disposal.

Supplementary Question:

That did not actually answer my question, and in terms of saving money, talking to the waste collection team this week while they were collecting the bins, has strike action by them then been considered in your savings calculation?

Supplementary Answer:

I believe I did answer your question. The savings come from three components, that is how it saves money.

121.3 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question

There are several estates in Earley that are not suitable for wheelie bins, has any provision been made for residents who cannot physically store these eyesores anywhere?

Answer

We are reviewing areas where bins cannot be stored within the boundary of the property, or where the bins are not easily accessible to the collection crews. Each area will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but we are able to draw upon the experience and various solutions of the 85% of councils that have already adopted wheeled bins.

Supplementary Question:

So, you have not actually done the work? My supplementary was simple, how many homes were actually effected, but if you have not done the work, how can you make a guess when you are ordering these bins in the first place, in order to make sure how many you needed, and how many homes were not suitable?

Supplementary Answer:

It is an ongoing process and most of it has been done, but as things come to our attention, we will look at them on an individual basis.

122. Petitions

The following member of public and Members presented petitions in relation to the matter indicated.

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

| | |
|--|---|
| Councillor Andy Croy | A petition signed by 30 people regarding the Headley Road, blue badge parking bays. Referred to the Highways and Transport team. |
| Sarah Bell | A petition signed by 66 people requesting a 20mph speed limit in Hawthorn, Shinfield. Referred to the Highways and Transport team. |
| Councillors Marie Louise Weighill and Rachel Burgess and | A petition signed by 74 people requesting the reinstatement of non-vehicle specific parking permits in Rose Street. Referred to the Highways and Transport team. |
| William Brown | A petition signed by approximately 600 people asking to compensate businesses for loss of trade caused by California Crossroads redevelopment. |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| | Referred to the Highways and Transport team. |
| Councillor Jackie Rance | A petition signed by 172 people requesting the improvement of the footpath between Lailey Path and Shinfield Infant School. Referred to the Highways and Transport team. |

123. Affordable Housing Strategy 2024 - 2028

Council considered the Affordable Housing Strategy 2024-28, set out at Agenda pages 35 to 48.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray, that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Councillor Conway highlighted the constructive role that the Overview and Scrutiny Committees had played in reviewing the document.

Councillor Andy Croy requested that the words 'or creative industries' be deleted from the Strategy. Councillor Conway as proposer of the report agreed to this amendment.

RESOLVED: That Council approves the:

- 1) Adoption and implementation of the Affordable Housing Strategy 2024-2028, as amended;
- 2) Removal of the requirement for key workers to have lived within the Borough for the previous five years within the Council's allocations policy;
- 3) consultation on proposals to place care leavers into band 1 of the Council's allocation policy.

124. Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-2028: To provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation for our Care Leavers, 16/17 year olds at Risk of Homelessness and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Council considered the Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-28, set out in Agenda pages 49 to 88.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Conway highlighted that the Strategy sat under the main Affordable Housing Strategy. It focused on the need for specialist accommodation for care leavers and young people, under the threat of homelessness.

RESOLVED: That the adoption of Wokingham Borough Council's Young People's Housing Strategy 2024-2028: To provide safe, secure, and affordable accommodation for our Care Leavers, 16/17-year-olds at Risk of Homelessness and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, be approved.

125. Statement of Licensing Policy 2024-2029

Council considered the Statement of Licensing Policy report, set out in Agenda pages 89 to 246.

It was proposed by Councillor Sarah Kerr and seconded by Councillor Rachel Burgess that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Kerr emphasised that the Statement of Licensing Policy was an update on best practice. She praised officers for the proactive stance that they took regarding licensing.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation of the Licensing and Appeals Committee on 23 January 2024, be noted and that the revised Statement of Licensing Policy 2024 – 2029, be approved.

126. Constitution Update

Council considered a report giving an update on the Constitution, set out in Agenda pages 247 to 304.

It was proposed by Councillor Imogen Shepherd-Dubey and seconded by Councillor Chris Johnson that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Councillor Rebecca Margetts requested that 2.1, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 be voted on together and that 2.2 be voted on separately. This was seconded by Councillor Peter Harper. This was agreed.

Councillor Imogen Sheperd-Dubey indicated that the Constitution Review Working Group was undertaking a full review of the Constitution and were trying to reorganise and simplify it as required. The report contained some proposed amendments to parts of the Constitution, including the anti fraud policies, the Planning Committee terms of reference, Shareholder Committee, and definition of a Key Decision.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal expressed concern regarding the formation of a Shareholder Committee and the removal of Councillors as directors. She was of the view that this would dilute their power and take away responsibility from them, particularly if the Committee only met three times per year. Councillor Blumenthal commented that councillors from other councils that had made the same change, had suggested that the system did not work. She commented that it was not in the best interest of residents.

Councillor Charles Margetts also disagreed with the formation of a Shareholder Committee. He stated that the Optalis governance structure had previously been a similar model, and that this had not been successful. A good management team would welcome scrutiny and input from councillors. Councillor Margetts felt that scrutiny and accountability would be reduced.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen stated that it was normal practice for businesses to have directors of varying levels of expertise. She questioned why the Opposition Member on the Shareholder Committee would be non-voting.

Councillor Stephen Conway stated that previous systems had not been entirely successful, and that an independent review had been commissioned. He emphasised that the Shareholder Committee would meet three times a year at a minimum, and likely more. The Shareholder Committee would set the strategy for the companies and monitor progress.

Councillor Johnson stated that he was satisfied to follow the advice of independent experts and agreed with the establishment of the Shareholder Committee.

RESOLVED: That Council:

- 1) Notes the progress towards completing a fundamental review of the Constitution;
- 2) Agrees the following changes to the Constitution, as recommended by the Monitoring Officer via the Constitution Review Working Group:
 - 2.1 Anti-Fraud Policies update, as recommended by Audit Committee on 29 November 2023 (see section 4 of report)
 - 2.2 Shareholder Committee (see section 5)
 - 2.3 Key decisions (see section 6)
 - 2.4 Planning Committee – terms of reference and terminology (see section 7)
 - 2.5 Changes to Directors' job titles (see section 8)

127. Audit Committee Annual Report 2023-24

Council considered the Audit Committee annual report 2023-24, set out in Agenda pages 305 to 316.

It was proposed by Councillor Rachel Burgess and seconded by Councillor Mike Smith that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Burgess commented that the Committee had built on the positive changes that it had made in the previous year and now had two independent members of the Committee.

She thanked officers for supporting the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Audit Committee's annual report for 2023/24, as agreed at its meeting of 7 February 2024, be noted.

128. Standards Committee Annual Report 2023-24

Council considered the Standards Committee annual report 2023-24, set out in Agenda pages 317 to 326.

It was proposed by Councillor Morag Malvern and seconded by Councillor Caroline Smith that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Malvern commented that the report reflected the dedication and professionalism of the Monitoring Officer and his team.

RESOLVED: That the Standards Committee Annual Report for 2023/24, be noted.

129. Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Annual Reports 2023-24

Council considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committees annual reports 2023-24, set out in Agenda pages 327 to 352.

It was proposed by Councillor Alistair Neal and seconded by Councillor Chris Johnson that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Neal highlighted the range of topics covered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the municipal year.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Reports for 2023/24, be noted.

130. Outside Bodies Annual Reports 2023-24

Council considered the Outside Bodies annual report 2023-24, set out in Agenda pages 353 to 392.

It was proposed by Councillor Stephen Conway and seconded by Councillor Prue Bray that the recommendation in the report be approved.

Councillor Keith Baker expressed concern regarding the report for the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative. He commented that it was a Partnership and not an Initiative. He was also of the view that some statements made in the report were incorrect. Councillor Andy Croy emphasised that his comment that the Initiative was limited to what it could achieve, related to funding.

Councillor Prue Bray commented that the reports were a reflection of the opinions of those Members on the Outside Body and that there could, therefore, be disagreement with other Members.

Councillor Stephen Conway reminded Members that the recommendation was to note the reports.

RESOLVED: That the reports on Outside Body representation for the 2023/24 municipal year, set out as Annex A to the report, be noted.

131. Member Question Time

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

131.1 Sam Akhtar asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council:

Question

The car park adjacent to Charvil Piggott Primary School has been closed since 20th of November due to a sink hole. As a result of the car park being closed, families are having to park on the road outside. With no crossing outside the school, this is very dangerous. I am aware Charvil Parish Council and WBC have agreed to jointly

fund the repairs. Can you please provide a timeline for the repair of the sink hole and re-opening of the car park as well as confirming what is being put in place to ensure pupils can cross the road safely in the meantime?

Answer

As you observe, the Borough Council has been working in partnership with Charvil Parish Council and agreement has been reached between both parties to enable the remedial works to the sink hole to be carried out.

Extensive survey work has been necessary to review the geology and drainage in the area in the vicinity of the sink hole to make sure it is not part of a wider problem. I am glad to report that we now know it is not part of a wider problem. We are, therefore, in discussions with the contractors to carry out the remedial works on the area of the sink hole and we estimate that these will be concluded no later than the end of April.

As we now know that the problem is confined to the area of the sink hole itself, and not wider, we intend to reopen the eastern part of the car park, that is the car park nearest the school, while work proceeds on the sink hole, which should remove the necessity for parking in the road.

131.2 Michael Firmager asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question

Following all the recent rain which has left the Borough's roads in a worse state than before with the existing potholes and those recently filled deteriorating rapidly and new ones forming.

Wokingham Borough Council has received a current baseline of £4,321,000 for road maintenance from the Government for this municipal year, plus £418,000 and £589,200 in additional funding. Funding for road maintenance from the Government has increased by 30% compared to the previous municipal year.

Please can the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways advise how this will be spent?

Answer

Department for Transport statistics show that our road network is in better shape than the national average. It puts the Borough well into the top 20 of councils for maintenance work carried out on its road network. Despite this, the long-term underfunding of road maintenance by government has created an enormous backlog, making roads more vulnerable to damage, including potholes, and the annual ALARM survey now estimates that there is a backlog of £16.3 billion in England and Wales. This is an increase of £2.1 billion in one year.

In Wokingham the baseline Government allocation of £4.054 million for this financial year includes £2.280 million for structural road maintenance. The remainder is for other highway assets such as crash barriers, integrated transport, and bridges. When inflation is factored in our annual spend is a reduction in real terms of our road

network investment. Furthermore, this reduction is further impacted through out-of-date data used by the DfT in its funding assessments. It still uses road length data from 2012 despite authorities providing road length data annually. Wokingham has seen a 61% increase in the lengths of its urban unclassified road network, aligned to meeting its housing provisions, yet it is not being rewarded fairly for doing so.

The allocation of £418,000 received this year and the £418,000 identified for next year, will be used to support the structural maintenance programme. The commitment is to spend these sums before the end of March 2025. The allocation of £589,000 is being spent on planned works involving surfacing and structural repairs across 27 locations.

Supplementary Question:

I think when you travel around the Borough, and certainly when you go outside the Borough as well, the roads around here are in an absolute dreadful state. The roads are in a rather abysmal state, and what Councillor Fishwick actually announced, these are substantial amounts of money. What I really want to know is how will this be prioritised, and when is the work going to start?

Supplementary Answer:

The work is undertaken using road conditions surveys. These are done annually. This develops our programme, and it is rated into Red, Amber 1, Amber 2, and Green. What we focus our efforts on is part of it into the Red, that is the resurfacing, and the preventative maintenance into the Amber 1 and Amber 2. That prolongs the life of the asset so that we can get that in a condition where we do not need to touch it for the next 5-10 years. The work is already starting in April/May time. It will be starting this Spring. It will be a continuous programme throughout the rest of the year, and it will be actually published on our website. Part of that information is already on our website, which is the network north requirements of £418,000. That is published because Government requests us to publish which particular schemes we are going to be focusing on with that particular money.

131.3 Stephen Newton asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question

Last September the Guardian reported that 'Woking Borough Council had announced a sweeping package of cuts to local services, after the local authority in effect declared itself bankrupt in June, revealing a £1.2bn deficit racked up from a risky investment spree overseen by its former Conservative administration'.

In Wokingham, the Liberal Democrats ran a successful campaign to stop the excessive borrowing and speculative investment by our Conservative Administration. Who knows where we might be now if that campaign had failed. As part of its prudent financial management, Wokingham lends money to other local authorities. The Council lent £10 million to Woking at 4.75% interest, a return of over £356,000 to be repaid on 8th March 2024.

The Council Tax baseline report that was considered by this Council in January, showed that there are approximately 74,000 households within our Borough. So, the

loan interest equates to a windfall gain of just under £5 per household.

Did the loan and the interest come back as promised, and can you please include in your answer how the additional £356,000 will be used to help our residents?

Answer

The loan was indeed repaid to us on time and all of the due interest was received. All of this interest received, is accounted for in the General Fund budget position and the great thing about these interest payments is that it is revenue.

Revenue is spent on running the day to day services that everyone uses. These day to day services include things such as running libraries, getting children to school, fixing potholes and providing care for the elderly and disabled, which are just some examples.

Many of these loans are made from ringfenced Capital. One example might be the money that a developer gives us to build a road. In that instance, the money comes in slowly as the houses are sold and we cannot spend the money until we have enough of it to start building that road. We also cannot spend the money on anything else, but we can loan it to another local authority in the short-term. It is important we look for the best way to invest that money short-term, including considering loans to other local authorities which offer a better return. This is important as it is also one of the mechanisms to protect against inflation pressures.

Supplementary Question:

I understand that there was an article in the local paper about the Council actually losing money on this loan. Is this true?

Supplementary Answer:

I am afraid it is not. I believe the article is in relation to a forward deal to borrow which was agreed in November 2022, based on the Council's high projected spending needs. We secured the loan at an interest of 4.2% on this borrowing, and, therefore, hedged against escalating interest rates, which did indeed occur. As a result of our rigorous endeavours to reduce and delay the capital expenditure, and to reduce our level of borrowing need, this money was able to be lent out at a short term at a rate of 4.75% in June 2023. It has been subsequently lent out again at 5.5% which you will see is somewhat higher than the 4.2% that we borrowed it at. I stress that this would not have been available if we had not continued at our previously expected rate of capital spending that has been set out by the previous, former administration.

So, no, it is completely untrue that the Council lost money, and the combined work of expenditure management and the sound investment decision making, and we actually made £41,000 of revenue on this deal. This is all part of our relentless treasury management efforts to reduce costs and to maximise income wherever we can, and I thank the team for all the work that goes into this complex and significant ongoing activity of borrowing and lending.

131.4 Andrew Mickleburgh asked the Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty the following question:

Question

It is widely acknowledged that the Household Support Fund (HSF) has been a vital lifeline for many of our vulnerable residents during the ongoing cost of living crisis. The HSF was set to end on the 31st March. Following robust lobbying from charities and councils, the Chancellor announced in the March 6th Spring Budget that the HSF will now continue to September. However, concerns have been raised that extending the HSF for only six months, rather than a full year, has continued the uncertainty about the future of this fund, as there was in the months leading up to the Budget. What is WBC doing to mitigate the impacts that the extension of the still needed HSF by only six months, rather than a full twelve months, is likely to have on our Borough's residents?

Answer

I am pleased that following the lobbying in Wokingham and nationally, the government has finally decided to extend the Household Support Fund. This gives us the money to continue to provide children on free school meals with food vouchers over the school holidays until the end of this year's six week summer holiday. We are urgently exploring the best way of using the remaining money to support residents living in hardship.

I share your concerns that the extension is only for six months. This leaves our most vulnerable residents facing a financial cliff edge, with no certainty about how the government plans to replace this funding. Unless the Household Support Fund is replaced, the government will be directly removing money from the pockets of those who need it most. To mitigate the impact of short-term government thinking, we will continue to invest in longer term solutions to fight poverty in Wokingham.

Our Tackling Poverty action plan:

- Is supporting the launch of the Roots Community Store, including helping it to expand and become self-sustaining.
- Is continuing to support the two School Days projects to directly help families living on the lowest incomes afford the cost of the school day.
- Is rolling out help to prevent residents from getting into unmanageable debt, through debt surgeries and our partnership with the Boom community bank.

And of course, the Hardship Alliance - made up of VCS partners and Council officers - continues to be key to understanding who is in the greatest need and targeting resources to meet them.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you, Rachel, for sharing my concerns that the extension of the HSF is just for six months, and also for sharing with us some of the many activities that our Council is engaging in to support our most vulnerable residents during these difficult times. Notwithstanding, will you be recommending to other Executive Members that WBC lobbies our local MPs and the relevant government minister to ensure that the HSF will continue for a full twelve months?

Supplementary Answer:

Yes, that is a very definite yes from me. I am already talking to the officers about what we can do. The cost of living crisis is not over by any stretch of the imagination. It is not going to be over in six months' time. In fact, there were some figures that were published which showed that the UK was facing the greatest rise in those living in absolute poverty in 30 years. If this money is not extended, as we go into the winter, we are going to see Wokingham residents who are not going to be able to afford enough food and enough heating. It is absolutely critical that this money continues, so we will be lobbying on this for the money to continue, or even better, for the Household Support Fund, which is kind of like a temporary patchwork of funding, to be replaced by something which is a longer term, coherent way of supporting those who live on the lowest levels of income.

131.5 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

In the last school year, I understand the school secondary placements went very well with most pupils getting their first choice. This is great achievement with challenges such as under-funding, extra homes being built in Wokingham, above the required amount, and high numbers of mid-term incomers etc. Please can I have an update on exactly how many pupils have attained their first choice at Secondary School this year?

Answer

On the national offer day this year, 97% of Wokingham children received a school place offer of one of their preferred schools and just over 80% received an offer of a place at the school of their first choice. Both outcomes are better than the past two years. I have a table of who got what preference and we can ensure that it goes into the Minutes.

| | 1 st preferred school | 2 nd preferred school | 3 rd preferred school | 4 th preferred school | Divert to non preferred school |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| WBC Students preference summary secondary 2024 | 80.21% | 11.21% | 3.89% | 1.66% | 3.04% |
| WBC Students preference summary secondary 2023 | 77.14% | 12.10% | 4.53% | 1.86% | 4.37% |
| WBC Students | 76.26% | 11.30% | 4.42% | 1.78% | 6.24% |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| preference summary secondary 2022 | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

Supplementary Question:

I am also pleased to say that, that sounds a great success story for the residents of Wokingham, and can I assume that this will continue on to next year?

Supplementary Answer:

I never like to assume anything, but I believe that we do have plans in place, and in fact at the Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee last night, we had a preview of the forthcoming School Places Strategy, which showed that we are confident that we will have enough places for secondary school children for the next few years, thanks to the cooperation and the building work that is going on with our academy trusts and local secondary schools. So, I am very hopeful that it will.

131.6 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following the question:

Question

I have seen on the television and read in local and national social media that potholes are affecting the roads across the whole of the country, not just here in Wokingham. Therefore, it appears that the government has underfunded local councils.

For me to understand this more fully, in Wokingham Borough, what funding has been allocated to road resurfacing type schemes in the past five years and what has been allocated for 2024/25 please?

Answer

I have got a table on here for you, so you can have a look afterwards. It sets out the allocations approved within the MTFP for the previous five year period and for the current financial year.

The government allocation has remained static at £2.280 million a year since 2018. Nationally the latest Road Maintenance study found that there was a backlog of over £16.3 billion in local road repairs due to a decade of underfunding by this Conservative government, this is an increase in £2.1 billion in one year.

We also put money in as a council. Contrary to what the Conservatives may claim, in their final budget, inherited by the Lib Dems, Conservatives cut the Council’s road maintenance by 28%.

Despite the biggest financial challenges, the Council has ever seen, we have protected the road maintenance budget in cash terms. We have also introduced innovations to make this money go further.

Our roads are above average for condition when compared to other councils. This is because we choose to invest in them ourselves, which we do via capital borrowing

each year to a similar value to the government base grant. Without that, our network condition would be far worse.

The government's cancelled HS2 project has provided us with an additional £418,000 in 2023/24 and 2024/25 that we have committed to Strategic maintenance.

£418,000 will pay to resurface around a tiny 0.37% of our road network. But 14% of our roads are already assessed as in need of resurfacing. Therefore, the reality is that the additional funding is a drop in the ocean.

| Period | Government Grant (see note 1) | WHIS capital borrowing |
|---------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 2018/19 | £2.280 | £0 |
| 2019/20 | £2.280 | £0 |
| 2020/21 | £2.280 | £3.850 |
| 2021/22 | £2.280 | £2.968 |
| 2022/23 | £2.280 | £2.126 |
| 2023/24 | £2.280* | £2.126 |
| 2024/25 | £2.280* | £2.126 |

Note 1 - Figures show the specific sum allocated to carriageway maintenance as part of the overall government grant block allocation. Other capital allocations are made from the grant block for maintenance of other assets.

Note 2 2023/24* and 2024/25* Additional funding £589K allocated to strategic maintenance. Additional £418k for each financial year spread over both years allocated to strategic maintenance.

Supplementary Question:

I think I understood the figures that were just given to me. A very comprehensive answer thank you Paul.

If I have understood it correctly, then for the last 6 years we have had a 25% cut in real terms from central government funding for road maintenance. As a professional engineer I spent most of my career trying to maintain systems that were both hazardous and complex, where maintenance is always intended to prevent failure, whereas in local authority context, and most of the building trade, it is all about repair after the failure. I am aware that we have put substantial money, just over £2million into this year's budget. Has the Borough always supplemented some of the shortfall by government, and how has lack of government funding contributed to the poor state of the roads around the Borough, please?

Supplementary Answer:

The previous Conservative administration did not actually supplement any government grant funding before 2020, and underfunding then together with the latest road survey findings provides a growing backlog of maintenance in England and Wales, now £16.3 billion. The continued long term under funding by this Conservative government is certainly one of the main reasons for the poor state of all our nation's roads.

131.7 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services the following question:

Question

This Council's Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) action plan contains little to no measurements to let us know if the actions are reducing VAWG in our Borough, which is its ultimate aim. In Autumn 2022, I asked Councillor Sarah Kerr at Executive if it would contain measurements and she said yes, there would be SMART objectives (with the M standing for measurable). In July 2023, the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel saw that this wasn't the case and councillors cross-party said the plan needs to contain measurements. In January 2024, half a year later, the scrutiny committee saw that the plan still contained no measurements. At the end of February 2024, we were emailed the plan with a small number of the actions containing measurements but with the majority none at all. Why do we have a VAWG action plan with a complete inability to indicate if its reducing VAWG in our Borough at all?

Answer

I am sorry you have made a vital part of all our work with often badly traumatised women, Political. As you know reducing violence against women and girls is a complex and cross cutting subject. Attitudes towards gender-based violence are often outdated and shows prejudice against women and girls across systems, processes and cultural norms.

The development of a Wokingham VAWG Strategy and action plan, shows our commitment to both acknowledging that this must be challenged and changed. In line with comments received from the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that the work we embark upon is victim focused and victim-led, we must take time to understand the experiences of local victims. For obvious reasons, this must and will be managed and navigated carefully and sensitively.

I hope we all understand that to change decades of systemic issues of prejudices and cultural norms will not be measurable until we understand what is important to local victims. Indeed, I ask the question, is it a positive to get more reports of VAWG as women become more confident in the work being done and trust our metrics, or is that negative? For some situational and environmental improvements, the measures and improvements such as fixing or increasing lighting, can easily be both measured and achieved and have been added, but I do not accept that this is the solution to tackling VAWG. The answer is much deeper with lots of complex layers, with many moving parts and a whole systems response including the criminal justice system, health, town planners, licensing, which you have heard about today, and education and government.

Supplementary Question:

Public policy should be one thing, and one thing only, which is effective. If we cannot demonstrate a plan or strategy's effectiveness to residents, then really, we are not doing our job. Me questioning this, which purely shows that I want to help women and girls, and you just label it as Political. To denigrate it, is offensive and wrong.

But my question is, will you commit to publishing next year how much the Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan has reduced violence against women and girls in this Borough?

Supplementary Answer:

I am sorry you were offended Laura, but you have offended me so do not worry. I think that the fact that you asked for and you did not hear what I said, because the Violence Against Women and Girls, the problem is measuring it. Is it good that we get more reported or less reported? More reported means more people feel safer reporting it. Less reporting means they might not feel so safe. If we did not ask them then there would not be any reported, so we have got to make sure that we get the right metrics to measure how effective and efficient this is.

132. Minutes of Committee Meetings and Ward Matters

132.1 Jordan Montgomery asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Yesterday residents in my ward, namely those living on Hatch Ride, had their road closed for the repair of multiple potholes. While action on road surfaces is always welcome, following the end of said works, the extent of the repairs has unfortunately been limited to only a small number of select potholes, despite further and more significant holes within the close area remaining in place. Moreover, having spoken with residents yesterday, despite a five and a half hour period being set aside for works, many reported that the work area had been vacated within two hours of their start period. What assurances can be given to Wokingham Without residents that one, remaining potholes on Hatch Ride will be addressed in the immediate future, and two, that allotted times for works are more appropriately assessed, so that residents can more effectively plan their schedule around assigned works, and three, and finally, that more effective use of road closures are utilised to achieve the greatest amount of remedial works within the minimum amount of disruption to residents?

Answer:

I am afraid I am going to have to look into this one. This is not a good use of time by the looks of things for a closure, and if there are other defects which still should have been repaired, whilst the road closure was undertaken, we certainly do not want the road to be closed again to do that. So, I will look into this and come back to you.

132.2 Andy Croy asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question:

Last month, and I am very, very grateful, Council agreed to send, or to pay Woodley Town Council £15,000 as a contribution towards CCTV. Could you give me an assurance that once Woodley Town Council has finished its procurement exercise, and tells the Borough we want our £15,000, that the Borough will transfer the money and not interfere in the procurement exercise?

Answer:

I cannot see that the Borough would. As far as I am aware that £15,000 was added just to cover the CCTV that you asked for. So, yes.

132.3 Pauline Helliard Symons asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question:

How many children in Wokingham Without ward received their first choice of secondary school places this year, and what proportion of SEND children are in my ward, and what percentage of those are attending schools outside of the Borough?

Answer:

I am afraid I am going to have to give you a written answer. If I had had some notice of that question I could have given you an answer on the night, but I do not have those figures to hand.

132.4 Rachelle Shepherd-Dubey asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Can you give me an update on the crossing for Bearwood School? To quote the people up there, children's lives matter, and also so do their parents who are accompanying them.

Answer:

Bearwood School, Sindlesham. There has been a scheme for around ten years now, waiting to be implemented. It involves a formal crossing and the speed limit reduced from 40mph down to 30mph. The good news is that has now progressed to the detailed design, which will be undertaken. We will also need to go out to consultation, that will include the Police, and providing all of that goes through smoothly, we will then be able to introduce it as soon as possible.

132.5 Stuart Munro asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

A lot of my residents are unable to use any of the dark water treatments systems in my villages. Have we got any commitments from Thames Water to fix this problem by upgrading dates for the pumping station please?

Answer:

I actually have not got an answer I can give you immediately on that. Obviously, Thames Water came to Overview and Scrutiny not too long ago. They have made broad commitments, but I am aware of the fact that their capability to borrow money is somewhat limited at the current time, and they do need to borrow money in order to do a lot of the things that they have been talking about. It is something which affects just about every waterway in our Borough, and as such it is something that we would like to get on top of, but our powers are limited, extremely limited, because it is mainly an Environment Agency matter. I will see what I can find out Stuart.

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

Question:

Last week Hawkedon councillors were contacted by one of our residents who rents a home privately, and receives a local housing allowance (LHA) component of Universal Credit. Her rent is above the current LHA amount, so she pays the difference herself. The LHA is intended to help people on low incomes pay for the cost of rented accommodation. The government recently increased the LHA to bring it more in line with private rent costs to ease the burden on people, like my resident, who have been paying a top up. My resident was recently told by their landlord that because the LHA has increased, they would increase the rent to include the full amount of the increased LHA plus what they currently pay on top of the LHA. Could you please raise this matter with WBC officers to explore any opportunities to help this, and similar residents, who are being treated in this manner, and write to our Borough's Members of Parliament to express our concerns, and to seek their thoughts on remedies to this problem?

Answer:

I am very sorry to hear of the experience of your resident Andrew, and the answer I think is yes, and yes.

132.7 Caroline Smith asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

As a Council we are all concerned about safety around schools. This is a priority for this administration. We are using many highways schemes to improve safety around the Borough's schools. One of these methods is the Schools Street initiative, and I understand one scheme is being considered in my ward at Radstock School. Please can I have an update on this scheme?

Answer:

Yes, you are correct, Radstock is one that we are looking to have a pilot on. Now that we have got the moving traffic offences powers we can then, therefore, use cameras instead of using volunteers, which some authorities have to do, but I will keep you posted on the programme for that once we have that.

132.8 Graham Howe asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

In the two years that he has held the role there has been a lot of talk but no confirmed action on tackling the speeding, congestion and parking issues in Wargrave, or indeed in Remenham and Ruscombe too. Could he please give me what we should tell my parish, what he has achieved in the last two years, definitively?

Answer:

On parking issues there are several locations where we have introduced parking restrictions, and there are more still to come in Amendment 2. Those are normally submitted by ward members. You may not have submitted any, so that may be why there are not that many in Wargrave or Remenham, but there are certainly some that have been submitted, and they are currently being introduced at the moment, which was Amendment 1, and will go in, in the Spring, and in Amendment 2 which will go in the Summer subject to them getting through the Traffic Regulation and the

consultation.

Regarding speeding, speeding is down to Thames Valley Police. They are the ones that have the powers, and we liaise with Thames Valley Police on locations where there are speeding incidents, and that information is passed over to them, and it is down to them to actually undertake the mobile speed cameras where they can fit them in. There is a strict criteria that they have to work to, and if they do have a location to do that, then they will undertake that work.

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

Question:

In the Minutes of the Executive meeting on 22 February, under item 106, the Executive discussed the setting up of the Berkshire Prosperity Board, which as I understand it will be the body that replaces the Local Enterprise Partnership. What I want to ask is given the current difficult position that many businesses find themselves in due to the state of the national economy and the unfair business rates system which creates extra cost for businesses, with physical premises compared to purely online businesses, will the Berkshire Prosperity Board be looking at lobbying for reform of business rates to help local businesses?

Answer:

The Berkshire Prosperity Board is obviously formed by the six unitary authorities, and I think it would be very rash of me to make a pledge that we would go down the route that you are suggesting Clive, without consulting with and getting agreement from my colleagues in the other Berkshire unitaries. However, I do believe that this is something that we will want to take up because it clearly effects businesses across the county, and I do not imagine any of the Berkshire leaders, of whatever political persuasion, will want to not go down the route that you are suggesting.

132.10 Rebecca Margetts asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Both myself and David Cornish have received an email from a local resident who has been using the SHINE programme for the last two years, and her current instructor is specially trained for older, over 50's, so that is probably including myself now. Her class is, unfortunately, ceasing. What plans are in place to ensure that classes will be safe and suitable for this lady in particular, because the current classes are moving to Places for Leisure and will be open for all residents? That was her question, what plans were in place for residents like her?

Answer:

The SHINE programme has lost a lot of participants since the pandemic to the point where it has been losing money quite considerably. We had 75 classes before the pandemic and then we were down to 33 recently. It is basically being transferred to the management of Places Leisure, but some of the classes will continue exactly as they have been, others will have changes to them. The pricing structure will be different, a considerably well thought out pricing structure, and I can send you details of that.

The instructors and teachers in some cases, many of them were self-employed and

the Council was finding it difficult to retain them because they were not getting the return for their time, due to the decreasing number of participants. They will be in a better position with Places Leisure as they will actually get access to sickness benefits and things like that which they would not have as self-employed instructors working for the Council. I think it is just fair for me to send you all the details of the price structure, and all the details of the classes that will continue. I have a whole table of that which I can do.

132.11 Mike Smith asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Loddon Primary School in my ward has two entrances, one on Silverdale Road, and one on Hillside Road. The entrance on Silverdale Road has an advisory 20mph sign with flashing lights on either side. On the other on Hillside Road, it has just triangular warning signs saying 'School.' Please could you tell me what is the correct process for a resident to request a legally enforceable 20mph limits at both entrances, and how could or how should such a request be processed?

Answer:

What I will do is I will send you a link. There is a special form on our website requesting changes in speed limits. What will then happen is that there is a step-by-step process that the officer team will have a look at, assess it, and if they consider that it is worthy of going ahead, a scheme will be drawn up, it will go through a public consultation including with Thames Valley Police. If everything is fine after that then a Traffic Regulation Order will be made for a 20mph speed limit.

132.12 Shahid Younis asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

My question is for the Executive Member for Highways and is regarding the two disabled parking slots on Headley Road, where two EV charging units have been installed. I understand the solution for the long term but that could take months. In the short term the situation that we have is that we lose the disabled parking slots and those are the ones which are the very nearest to the Oakwood Centre, which is heavily used by the public. Secondly, the marking is still there, and this has caused so much confusion to the public about who should park there, for example can the disabled drivers not needing EV park there, or is it only the disabled drivers wanting EV charging and no one else?

So, my question is what was the rationale behind putting two EV charging points where the disabled parking slots were in the first place, and what is a short-term solution which the Council proposes, which will avoid that confusion to the public?

Answer:

The simple answer is that they remain blue badge bays, and there is no change. The EV points have been installed there but they will not be used as such by anybody else who is not a blue badge holder, because the blue badge holders are the only ones who are allowed to park there. Those are the terms and conditions of the car park. The bays themselves are not actually wide enough for a blue badge, despite them being there for some time. We have located two other positions where

the blue badge holders can go, and that is now in process of happening. Once that happens then the new blue badge holders will be parking in a slightly different location with a dropped kerb, because at the moment where the existing blue badge bays are, there is no dropped kerb at all, and if you are a wheelchair user you would need to go about 40metres towards Lidl where the parking machine is and then go up the dropped kerb, and then all the way back again. So, the new location will be much, much better for disabled users.

**133. Statements by the Leader of the Council and Executive Members
Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Conway:**

As this is the last Council meeting of the municipal year, I think it is an appropriate moment for me to publicly thank the Chief Executive, the Chief Finance Officer, their CLT colleagues, and all officers of the Council for their hard work and commitment to the Borough. I would like to extend those thanks to my Executive colleagues and all councillors, regardless of party.

We can look back on a period of considerable achievement especially when viewed in the context of the financial challenges faced by the Council. Let me highlight a few examples. We have worked with our partners to produce the first draft of the Community Vision which will shape the Council's Strategy and the new Council Plan. We have forged a new strategic partnership with the University of Reading which will bring considerable benefits to the people and the businesses of the Borough, not least in helping us with our Climate Emergency Action Plan, our Economic Development Strategy and our employment training and skills agenda. We have led the way in the formation of the Berkshire Prosperity Board, which will enable us to bid for external funding for key infrastructure projects, with greater chance of success, and give us a stronger voice in national decision making. We have developed a much greater sense of corporate ownership of challenges to help reduce the pressure on Adult Social Care and housing budgets, for instance, we are converting some of our own estate to accommodation for young people in danger of homelessness and care leavers. We have pursued a policy of prevention, early intervention, and investing now to save later. A good example is our purchase of a new care home which increases provision in the Borough, and will help control future costs for the Council. Another is our successful bid for funding to build two new SEND schools in the south of the Borough, which will help to reduce the Council's home to school transport bill, in years to come. We have secured White Ribbon accreditation. Our partnership in TLIP has won national recognition.

We are including bold new policies on environmental sustainability and energy conservation in our emerging Local Plan, and we are also in that emerging Local Plan, aiming to designate many protected green spaces and areas of landscape value. We have approved the planting of a Covid Memorial Wood in Barkham. We have secured after much time and effort, a contract with SSEN, to connect our new Barkham Solar Farm to the Grid in 2026, which will help to decarbonise the Grid, and produce a healthy income for the Council, which it can use on services for our residents.

We can all, officers and councillors, take pride in these and many other achievements since May 2023. Thank you, Madam Mayor.

Executive Member for Children’s Services Councillor Prue Bray:

I have two items for this. The first is to tell you that the Council had a focused visit from Ofsted a few weeks ago, looking at our services for children in need and children with a child protection plan. Our focused visit does not result in Ofsted making a judgement, but they produce a letter with their views on what they found. The letter arising from their visit was published on the Ofsted website yesterday. I am absolutely delighted to be able to tell you that it was very complimentary indeed about our services, and it really hardly could have been any better. You can read it for yourselves, there is a link in the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda, but you can find it quite easily by googling ‘Ofsted Wokingham.’ This outcome is a tribute to the hard work of officers who have been determined to drive continuous improvement, and I would like to congratulate them, and thank everyone involved, both at the Council and among our partners.

That takes me to the second item. This is Helen Watson’s last Council meeting as she will be leaving in mid-April after two years as our interim Director of Children’s Services. Our new permanent director Emma Cockerell will be joining us shortly before Helen goes. I would like to sincerely thank Helen for everything that she has done for the Council, and for the Borough’s children. She has led improvement in every aspect of Children’s Services, in very challenging financial circumstances, and is leaving behind a legacy of a solid, capable team, who will continue the transformation of the service. I am so grateful for the support that Helen has given me over the past two years, and I think that it is very fitting that at this, her last Council meeting, I have been able to announce the positive outcome of the Ofsted focused visit, which underlines the contribution that Helen has made as DCS. So, on behalf of the whole Council, thank you Helen and very best wishes for the future.

Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan, Councillor Lindsay Ferris:

This will be my last speech on this. I want to mention the various infrastructure achievements since I took over the role in May 2022. These include saving Rook’s Nest Farm from 270 houses and replacing this with a Covid Memorial Wood, an additional area of woodland as part of the neighbouring SANG, and the site for two much needed SEND schools.

When we took over in 2022 the residents of Arborfield Green had been left with none of the promised facilities, despite over 1,000 homes having been built. Since that time, and with support from the planning officers and the developers, Crest and Cala Homes, we now have the commercial centre having gained planning approval last October, the community centre has been agreed and is in the process of being internally designed to support various local bodies, in fact the Leader of the Council, and I, visited it today. It is being designed and supported for local bodies. Plus, we have the Sainsbury’s supermarket fully approved with work about to start. I also wanted to include the Arborfield Sports Pavilion, but I hoped it would be going to the April Planning Committee, but it looks more likely to be May.

In the Thames Science Park, in addition to Shinfield Studios and the British Museum, we now have the National History Museum coming to this important scientific site, with a distinct possibility of another nationally important facility to follow. The long awaited new Twyford Library is close to being open.

More recently, the Council with the help of Homes England, who have provided £29.6million to support the South Wokingham distributor road, and greater flexibility for the various developers involved, the Southern SDL originally planned in 2011 and included in the current Local Plan, which runs until 2026, to provide 1,800 homes, will now be moving forwards in 2024. In particular the developers will now be providing the new primary school, community facilities and the allotments, which were originally to be paid for and provided by Wokingham Borough Council. Thank you.

Executive Member Business and Economic Development, Councillor David Cornish:

I hope Members do not think me too parochial if the subject of my first statement as an Executive Member is the impact of the reconstruction of California Crossroads on the local businesses. Having lived in Finchampstead for almost exactly 40 years I have a very deep affection for these businesses and like all other residents, am deeply concerned about the impact upon them. It is regrettable that this was not given greater consideration when this project was planned and signed off in 2018. There are lessons to be learnt about how such projects are managed in future, but to coin a phrase 'we are where we are.' We know that this a difficult time for all businesses in the area, and council officers are doing everything possible to help them with the temporary disruption. Project managers are meeting them daily to update them, and for the first time the Council has also used its own communications channels to offer support. Actions in place include maintaining business access and providing signage to show how to get to businesses, meeting with them daily to discuss deliveries and to plan work around them, making sure teams working on site use the local businesses every day, using wider communications including social media posts to encourage residents and others to support their local shops and businesses. However, and quite understandably, there are requests that we try and do more. If local government was funded better, it might be possible to consider financial support for these businesses, but it is not, and so we cannot, and we never have in the past. Most recently Wokingham Town Centre businesses were not compensated during the disruption caused by Market Place improvement works in 2017 and 2018.

Despite the emotions generated in Finchampstead we do have to be fair to all businesses across the Borough and to all of our taxpayers. The best option for business at the moment suffering a loss in trade due to the roadworks is to seek relief by applying to the National Valuers Office Agency for a possible reduction in their rateable value. The Council Leader has written to the VOA supporting local businesses wishing to claim. Beyond this the Executive has requested the senior officers of the Council to examine every possible avenue, however unlikely, by which we may be able to offer more support. We may not succeed but we will spare no effort in trying.

There is a consensus that California Crossroads badly needs improving and have been neglected for too long. The condition of the road and overall quality of the footpaths would have meant investment in the junction would have been needed soon anyway. The works taking place include the replacement and upgrade of the infrastructure, such as drainage systems and gulleys, which would always have caused major upheaval. This work will transform an unloved and car dominated

junction into a village centre that works for everybody, and of course is all funded by developers and not local taxpayers. This in the end will bring a new life to the area and more trade for the local businesses, but there is a gap to fill over the next several months, and we hope that all councillors and all other voices will do everything possible to resist the temptation to feed negativity by highlighting challenges, and instead support the local businesses by painting a positive picture about the future.

Executive Member Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services, Councillor David Hare:

I just want to say about the Adult Social Care mock review that was a great success. Despite being an authority in the bottom half of spend per user Wokingham had a very positive mock review. A few headlines that I have picked out. Residents of Wokingham are served well with high quality Adult Social Care Services. The overwhelming message the reviewers heard from the staff that they met, was how proud and happy they were to work in Wokingham. They felt supported within their teams and by their immediate managers and senior leadership team. Something very dear to my heart, and we have heard about it at the last Council meeting, is to recognise nationally that coproduction is a key area of focus for CQC. Many councils are struggling to demonstrate involvement and coproduction. In Wokingham the Peer Team heard of some excellent pieces of authentic and strong coproduction. We are going the right way. I know that there is always more to do, but this review was very positive, and will be shared with O&S in the new municipal year. The learning from it is already in practice, so that we can make our Adult Social Care better and better.

Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways, Councillor Paul Fishwick:

I have got a few things to talk about. Road maintenance is my first one. A month ago, the Department for Transport published some statistics on the national road condition data, and Wokingham Borough was in the top quartile for the best roads. However, there was an alarming trend that the average was in decline, indicating the continued underfunding by this Conservative government. This week the annual local roads maintenance survey report was published which backed up the data reported by the government's Transport Department, with an estimated £16.8billion backlog in road maintenance. This is an increase of £2.1billion in just one year and shows the lack of proper funding of road maintenance by this Conservative government, and no strategy for going forward, except to tinker around the edges whilst the road condition declines further.

My second point is about Winnersh Park and Ride. In November last year I announced that Winnersh Park and Ride would operate on Saturdays on a 20 minute frequency until at least mid April 2024. I am pleased to announce that the service will now be extended to operate on Saturdays until at least September 2024.

Electric vehicle charge points, I am pleased to announce that Wokingham Borough Council, has been awarded a further £264,000 of government funding to install on-street charge points in residential areas where there is little or no off-street parking available. The charge points will add to the 38 across 18 locations that we installed last year.

My final point is about traffic signals. I am also pleased to announce that we have been successful in our bid to the Traffic Signal Obsolescence Grant, where we have been awarded £528,000 to upgrade traffic signal systems, replacing unreliable and obsolete equipment to improve reliability. Thank you.

134. Statement from Council Owned Companies

There were no statements from Non Executive Directors of Council Owned Companies.

135. Motions

135.1 Motion 515 submitted by Pauline Jorgensen:

Council considered the following Motion, submitted by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Councillor Charles Margetts.

'This Council believes children should be able to walk or cycle to school safely. This is good for the health and independence of children, reduces the need for unnecessary car journeys and alleviates congestion. It is vital that the Council provides the appropriate infrastructure to enable this.

A crossing is needed on A327 Shinfield Road to access Crosfields School and for the benefit of residents and workers. Shinfield Road is very busy at rush hour and it is not realistic that anyone, particularly children, would choose to walk/cycle to work or school when they have to cross such a busy road without a formal crossing, as they cannot do so safely. A week long December 2023 pedestrian survey undertaken by parents and residents shows that the requirement for 50 crossings per hour in the peak hours has been met and indeed exceeded already. A crossing would encourage many more pupils to walk to school, particularly those in the new Senior School.

Those that try and cross face extreme difficulty crossing the road, particularly in the dusk/dark. A 7 year old boy was recently knocked down and injured on his way to Crosfields School, by a cyclist overtaking a bus. Paramedics struggled to treat him due to the volume of cars on the road. Minor collisions and near misses are a regular occurrence. At peak times, gaps in the traffic to enable someone to cross are few and far between. Pedestrians have to weave across unrelenting traffic or wait for a motorist to stop. It is only a matter of time before a more serious accident occurs.

This is the ONLY school in the Borough on an A road without a crossing. Crosfields School has offered to make a contribution towards a crossing. This Council will deliver a crossing without further delay to make access to this school safe.'

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen indicated that the road outside the school was not easy to cross for cyclists and pedestrians, and that a young boy had been knocked down and injured by a cyclist. Paramedics had struggled to treat the boy on site due to the busyness of the road. Crosfield School was one of the only schools in the Borough along an A road that did not have a crossing. Councillor Jorgensen had met with the School and officers in October 2021 to discuss crossing and cycle

access. A petition had been raised and she had also asked a question at a Council meeting. However, no action had been taken. The School had offered to contribute to the cost of a crossing.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Paul Fishwick and seconded by Councillor Andrew Mickleburgh.

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This is the ONLY school in the Borough on an A road without a crossing. Crosfields School has offered to make a contribution towards a crossing. This Council will deliver a crossing ***without further delay when the technical assessment meets the criteria and funding becomes available*** to make access to this school safer.

At this point in the meeting, 10.01pm, a 10 minute adjournment was held to consider the proposed amendment.

Councillor Paul Fishwick commented that he and Councillor Jones had met with parents and staff of Crosfield School, and that he had a lot of sympathy for their desire for a safe crossing. He highlighted crossings that had been installed and the creation of a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. Within that Plan was a route for the Shinfield Road which went past the school. Councillor Fishwick stated that approximately 20 requests for crossings were received per year and that each scheme had to be assessed to determine its benefits. Those areas most in need had to be prioritised. The threshold for a crossing had not been met when an assessment had been undertaken in June 2022. A more recent assessment had been undertaken and would be assessed by officers.

The proposer of the original Motion, Councillor Pauline Jorgensen, did not accept the

amendment.

Councillor Andrew Mickleburgh commented that the Council was committed to the promotion of active travel. He indicated that situations changed over time, and that the amendment enabled due process to be followed.

Councillor Andy Croy indicated that he volunteered with Community Speedwatch. There were many areas in the Borough where crossings were wanted, and he sympathised with residents' concerns. He stated that due process needed to be followed for the allocation of resources.

Councillor Laura Blumenthal read a statement from the child who had been hit and injured on the road and who was now afraid to walk to school. She referred to the Chief Finance Officer's comment regarding the possible cost of a crossing and stated that it was not possible to put a price on a child's life.

Councillor Catherine Glover indicated that as a ward member for Shinfield South, she liaised with Shinfield Parish Council regarding highways issues in the parish. In principle they had no objection to any measures which made cycling and walking safer and recognised the congestion in the area. However, this was also the issue elsewhere in the ward and the Borough. The Parish Council had not identified Shinfield Road as an area of the highest priority. She commented that the correct process needed to be followed when assessing the requests. Finally, she stated that no discussion had been held with the Parish Council regarding the original Motion.

Councillor Graham Howe emphasised that every child mattered.

Councillor Sarah Kerr referred to her own experience of one of her children having an accident on a busy road on the way home from school. She commented that it was important to listen to experts and their recommendations regarding priority. Councillor Kerr commented that should people have an issue with the process then they should challenge this.

Councillor Rebecca Margetts read a testimony from a child who lived near the school which highlighted the difficulties of walking to school. She did not support the amendment and felt that it did not give a target date for the installation of a crossing and delayed any action being taken.

Councillor Andrew Gray supported the amendment and emphasised the importance of fairness across the Borough, and the fact that requests needed to be considered in the same way. He felt that should the case be sufficiently strong for the installation of a crossing, that it should be entirely funded by the Council.

Councillor Stephen Conway also highlighted the need to be fair and equitable across the Borough. He indicated that he was aware of children being injured travelling to and from school in other areas. If a crossing was installed at Crosfield School and it was not the highest priority for action, then other areas could potentially be disadvantaged.

Councillor Keith Baker indicated that the Council's highest priority should always be

its residents. He highlighted that a crossing had previously been requested at Floreat Montague Primary School, and that this had not been actioned.

Councillor Prue Bray commented that she understood parents wanting a crossing at the school, but other schools were in a similar situation. It was not possible to make decisions for emotional reasons given the limited resources that the Council had.

Councillor Charles Margetts stated that it was vital that appropriate infrastructure was provided, and referred to the previous request for a crossing at Floreat Montague Primary School. He re-emphasised that Crosfield School was offering to contribute to the cost of the crossing, and questioned how much longer it would take for a crossing to be put into place.

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen indicated that she had met with officers to progress the crossing and cycle routes and that progress had been very slow. She felt that the parents had provided comprehensive evidence that a crossing was required. She pointed out the most recent assessment had, had to be redone due to errors, and stated that installing a crossing should be a high priority.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was carried and became the substantive Motion.

Upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That this Council believes children should be able to walk or cycle to school safely. This is good for the health and independence of children, reduces the need for unnecessary car journeys and alleviates congestion. It is vital that the Council provides the appropriate infrastructure to enable this.

A crossing is needed on A327 Shinfield Road to access Crosfields School and for the benefit of residents and workers. Shinfield Road is very busy at rush hour and it is not realistic that anyone, particularly children, would choose to walk/cycle to work or school when they have to cross such a busy road without a formal crossing, as they cannot do so safely. A week long December 2023 pedestrian survey undertaken by parents and residents shows that the requirement for 50 crossings per hour in the peak hours has been met and indeed exceeded already. A crossing would encourage many more pupils to walk to school, particularly those in the new Senior School.

Those that try and cross face extreme difficulty crossing the road, particularly in the dusk/dark. A 7 year old boy was recently knocked down and injured on his way to Crosfields School, by a cyclist overtaking a bus. Paramedics struggled to treat him due to the volume of cars on the road. Minor collisions and near misses are a regular occurrence. At peak times, gaps in the traffic to enable someone to cross are few and far between. Pedestrians have to weave across unrelenting traffic or wait for a motorist to stop. It is only a matter of time before a more serious accident occurs.

This is the ONLY school in the Borough on an A road without a crossing. Crosfields School has offered to make a contribution towards a crossing. This Council will deliver a crossing when the technical assessment meets the criteria and funding

becomes available to make access to this school safer.

135.2 Motion 516 submitted by Laura Blumenthal:

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

135.3 Motion 517 submitted by Prue Bray:

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.

135.4 Motion 518 submitted by Graham Howe:

Due to time constraints this item was not considered.