

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2016 FROM 7.30 PM TO 8.50 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Julian McGhee-Sumner, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, John Kaiser, Philip Mirfin, Anthony Pollock and Angus Ross

Other Councillors Present

Mark Ashwell
Parry Bath
Prue Bray
UllaKarin Clark
Lindsay Ferris
Guy Grandison
Norman Jorgensen
David Lee
Ken Miall
Ian Pittock
Bob Pitts
Malcolm Richards

84. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

85. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26 November 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

86. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Pauline Jorgensen declared a personal interest in Item 89.1, Council Owned Companies Business, by virtue of the fact that her husband was a paid Non-Executive Director of WBC Holdings Ltd. Councillor Jorgensen remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Anthony Pollock declared a personal interest in Item 89.1, Council Owned Companies Business, by virtue of the fact that he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Optalis. Councillor Pollock remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

87. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

87.1 Ribina Shahin asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Why is there a complete lack of a unit or local college course for those with profound special needs leaving secondary school?

Answer

Before I answer your question I would like to formally apologise that the quote that was put into the paper was misinformed and incorrect. So hopefully you will accept my apology. I didn't realise at the time that you hadn't met with the Chief Executive of the Council.

Thank you for raising this question because it brings to light the complex situation in which there appears to be a shift in the approach undertaken by colleges to the running of those courses for learners with Additional Needs ranging from Moderate to Severe and Complex.

This in part relates to the funding formula that colleges operate within where payment is related to course success and retention. In such cases courses that do not attract or retain enough learners to become financially viable are cut. Numbers from Addington over the past three years have varied: in 2013 it was 2; in 2014, 2 and in 2015, 0. This has been the situation last academic year in terms of courses offered through Berkshire College of Agriculture.

In relation to courses offered for students with more complex needs such provision was established at Ravenswood, in Wokingham as part of the Reading College offer. This was established in partnership with Addington Special School and was designed to meet the needs of our most dependent young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties; often compounded by additional health and sensory needs. This provision was established for six students at Ravenswood building as it was fully accessible and met the appropriate requirements for teaching with space for 1-2-1 personal care facilities. Unfortunately, the Ravenswood site is leased by the college from Norwood-Ravenswood who have recently served notice to this arrangement thereby forcing the closure. Reading College's main campus is not able to provide similar accommodation that is required.

In 2016, it is anticipated that three Addington students need to transfer to the relocated Reading College provision that was based at Ravenswood (of whom two are Wokingham residents). Attempts have been made to identify suitable premises but with no success to date. The search is ongoing and is being taken further forward through both Wokingham Borough Council and our regional partners. Knowledge about the needs of primary age pupils currently at Addington indicates that the capacity that was provided at Ravenswood will be required, if not exceeded, in the medium to longer term.

In the meantime alternative providers have been sourced such as Newbury College in an effort to ensure opportunities are available to such students.

The availability of further education provision for students with Special Educational Needs is being addressed by the local authority through the EFA Post 16 Area Review from January –April 2016, and I believe you have had a conversation this morning about this, and directly through the Disability Strategy which is currently in draft form.

Supplementary Question

I am sure the Council are very clear and aware with regards to the rules, guidance and content of the Care Act. The Care Act refers to prevention, wellbeing and working with people who use the services when making decisions about care and support. Therefore how will the Council ensure they communicate fully with carers, like myself, to gain a balanced and more realistic point of view and not only consider the opinions of healthcare and other professionals?

Supplementary Answer

It is a very valid question and we do consider the Care Act of course. With the draft strategy that is being put together at the moment we will be seeking your views as to how we can go forward and also the post-16 area review is absolutely key that we listen to parents and all of your views about we can best address these needs. One part of the papers was about saying actually transport is a key element of getting our students to the colleges that already exist and fundamentally for children with additional needs and Special Educational Needs it is a key factor.

So I take on board your comments and I hope that you will be able to take part in the Disability Strategy that is currently in draft form and we look forward to inviting you to take part.

87.2 Paul Gallagher asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:

Question

This question relates to the recent increase in parking fees at Dinton Pastures/California Country Park. Whilst the Council's need to increase income is accepted, the 55% increase in the concessionary annual parking permit fee seems excessive both by reference to other increases and the general rate of inflation. In his recent Press Release related to this, the Exec Member for the Environment said "In terms of the car park increases, we have looked at country parks elsewhere and believe our recommended prices are broadly in line with them and would still represent amazing value for money". This was repeated in an email response to me when he said "I can assure you that we benchmarked our prices against a number of other country parks". I asked the Member for a copy of the relevant benchmark data but did not receive it. I have, however, received it in response to a general request to the Council. Can the Member please comment on why he believes that the increase to £112.50 for an annual concessionary season ticket is justified by the benchmark data which shows four comparators all of which are considerably cheaper than not only the proposed rate from January 2016 rate but also the existing 2015 rate? The comparator rates shown in the benchmark data are: Itchen Valley - £28.50, Danbury CP - £45, Great Notley £45 and Hadley Park - £45.

Answer

Clearly behind all this my main aim is to ensure you and all the residents can continue to enjoy our valuable Country Parks with their many diverse attractions.

We do carry out benchmarking with a number of Country Park providers across the country. The benchmarking is informative and gives context to our decision making, but it does not restrict us in terms of making decisions for our own local context. A number of the benchmarked organisations, for example, offer their particular Country Park service on a subsidised basis. We are clear that our Country Parks must be self-financing totally so as not to compete with the provision of our statutory services in this ongoing time of reducing Government Grants.

As part of this and to this end, we took the view that a season ticket should offer value for money for frequent visitors but that it should be a fair price compared with other visitors. We also introduced a half year rate. At peak rate a person wishing to park regularly and visit for 1 hour only will only take 100 visits to repay the ticket price, which is just less than twice a week over the whole year. Once the visitor spends more than one hour on site the number of visits to repay drops considerably, for two hours the number drops to about 50.

Season tickets still offer good value for money and will contribute significantly to the cost of the provision of the Borough's Country Parks and Nature Reserves and we can continue fully to support these local gems.

Supplementary Question

Do I understand you correctly then, Angus, that whereas the impression given in e-mails to me, and in the press release, was that the new price was comparable to elsewhere in fact you are saying that there are other factors that were taken into account?

Supplementary Answer

What I am saying is that I did some research myself after your e-mails with some of those sites and it is very clear if you look at their overall revenue budgets that they are supporting the country parks which as I said in my reply unfortunately is something we just cannot afford to do. So we have had to find a framework that makes the country parks self-sustaining and the main one for this, obviously, is the car park charges. We don't charge for anything else once you get in the country parks.

87.3 Clive Jones asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Question

Liberal Democrats worked with the former Managing Director of Reading Buses to get the number 19 Bus to the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Does Cllr Kaiser think this service has been a success?

Answer

The No 19 bus service provides an important link for residents of Woodley and Earley to access education, employment and leisure facilities in their own areas and into Reading. Various iterations of the service have been running with different service numbers and a link to Reading hospital was established in 2000 – some time before the former managing director of Reading buses started.

A large number of people and groups have met with the former managing director of Reading Buses in the period before changes to the route were made in 2014. For example Councillor David Chopping and Councillor Guy Grandison met him five times in 2013. The Maiden Erlegh Residents' Association also held meetings as did Earley Town Council. At the time of the consultation about possible changes the Earley Conservative Team delivered nearly 20,000 copies of five different leaflets encouraging residents to have their say in the consultation and explaining the proposals.

In 2014 the route was varied in order that the bus could manage to run on time. The changes were implemented on the basis of passenger numbers and the need to keep the service operating as efficiently as possible. Subsequently we have received a number of queries raising a concern about the changes.

Much of the route is still subsidised by Wokingham Borough Council, at a cost of £72,000 a year. The cost of journeys starting in Earley by those using free bus passes is also met by Wokingham Borough Council and in 2013 the subsidy to Reading Buses for journeys starting in Wokingham Borough amounted to £320,000.

A consultation has just been undertaken on this service to ensure it does meet the needs of the residents and I am awaiting for the analysis of the results by Officers and once I have those I will be happy to share those with local Members.

Supplementary Question

Many residents consider that the No 19 bus is really successful. The new Managing Director of Reading Buses tells me that it is a financially viable route. Residents would like the service to be half hourly and to be extended into the evening. What can you do to make that happen?

[**Note:** Following the meeting Clive Jones clarified that the new Managing Director of Reading Buses had actually said that the No 19 bus was only viable when the subsidy from the Council was included. Without the subsidy it would not be viable.]

Supplementary Answer

As I say we are waiting for the consultation to come back and once we have seen the results of that I will speak to the new managing director of Reading Buses and we will decide what we are going to do then. If the consultation is positive we will try to improve the level of service.

87.4 Keith Malvern asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question:

Question

Recognising in 89.2 of the Agenda (Revenue Monitoring 2015/16) that there has been overachieved car park income of £75k and the report from the RAC in the Bracknell News Weekender that Wokingham Borough Council made a surplus of £793k in 2014/15, how much more money does he want from us with his proposed car parking charges in the evening and Sunday?

Answer

The proposal to introduce evening and Sunday charges is estimated to raise £150,000 a year.

We have, for many years, charged for car parks during the day and generally this is something that is not disputed. People's travel and habits have changed and it would be remiss of us not to reflect this in how we run the Borough's assets; in this case car parks.

I understand that the additional cost to users is an anathema to some but we have to be pragmatic in the utilisation of our assets and a £1 charge needs to be seen in light of the overall spend that most people will incur on their trip.

Inevitably some people will choose to go elsewhere but we expect the level of resistance to be very low. We will monitor the impact on an annual basis to determine what effect, if any, the charges will have on car park use.

Most importantly though all of the revenue generated by car parks is invested in highways and transport and without this additional income stream there would be less money to spend on the roads that badly need it.

Supplementary question

By way of a supplementary I would like to do two things. One is to say to you that £150k next year is about £1 per person – now here is my £1 for you to give to Graham Ebers to see what he can come up with to try and resist this unnecessary change.

In your response as well you referred to an e-mail that Matt Davey had sent which he also sent to me so it has a familiar ring to it. I didn't like the tone very much but I want to read you just the other bit.

(At this point Councillor Kaiser clarified that he had not referred to an e-mail in his answer).

At the beginning of that e-mail from Matt Davey, who is Head of Highways and Transport, he refers as before to a certain amount of benchmarking being done but he does go on to say that the benchmarking was not to determine whether to charge or not as this principle, meaning the principle of evening and Sunday charging, has already been established. Now as far as I understand it we are in a middle of a consultation about something that has not appeared anywhere else before eg evening and Sunday charging. Therefore can you tell me where the principle of evening and Sunday charging has been established; otherwise we are wasting our time with this consultation?

Supplementary answer

The consultation goes out to everybody for their opinion but as a Council we need to utilise our assets the best we possibly can and I would say to you do you believe that our roads are not in a state that they need repairing?

The Leader of Council made the following comment:

The decision has not been made we will review the responses from the consultation and then on the basis of that a decision will be made as part of the overall Council budget setting.

88. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

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

88.1 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

Last July Councillors voted to support a motion that I proposed on the subject of school funding, which said:

“Government per pupil funding for Wokingham primary and secondary schools is the lowest in the country. This Council will actively lobby local MPs the Secretary of State for Education and the Department of Education until the level of funding for our schools is improved.”

Can you please tell me what you have done so far to lobby for more funding for our schools?

Answer

The funding position for our schools is a matter of deep personal importance to me. You will remember our most recent presentations and conversations on this topic on the past

week, at the Primary Schools Association Meeting, and as we maintain our focus on this issue.

We have made representations to the Department for Education setting out the poor settlement for our schools and the consequences of this lack of funding in terms of the additional pressures on our schools, our leaders and our teachers.

I have engaged our local MPs and been pleased with the support received. In particular, I would like to thank John Redwood and Teresa May for their unfailing challenge on our behalf. John Redwood has, I think, gone above and beyond in every way. He spoke on this on the cross party debate recently highlighting, in particular, the costs of setting up new schools which is a huge problem and later on we have got a paper on our Primary School Strategy. He has presented our Councillor petition to the House of Commons and he blogs regularly on his website. Also we have done lots of work internally as well through our Director of Children's Services, Andy Couldrick and also Pauline has been petitioning on our behalf as well. So it has been a relentless back and forth to central Government and we will continue to do this.

The funding situation at present remains unchanged as you know. However I welcome the announcement that we had before Christmas to consult on the funding review of schools nationally. We will be actively taking part in this consultation and making representations on behalf of our children, young people and our schools but as I said in the Primary Schools Association meeting I do not want to hold my breathe because we already are the lowest funded authority in the whole of the country and they may just look at us in central Government and say "if they can do it perhaps everyone else can do it to".

Supplementary question

You referred to last week's meeting and obviously I have been lobbying from our side but there is no change yet despite everything that has happened. There is a prospect of a change when they change the funding formula; although like you I am not holding my breath. Do you believe that the Council has enough resources to be able to support the maintained schools that are looking at possibly setting deficit budgets for this year?

Supplementary answer

This year, which has been unusual through the designated schools grant, we have looked at how schools can maintain themselves through this difficult period. We have drawn up a five year financial plan and it looks like some schools will go into deficit budget so then they will come back out of it and they will be more sustainable at the end of the five years. Some of them, as you will have seen from going to that meeting, are looking potentially at the academy route, not very many at this point, but that may allow them to become more sustainable. There are other routes: looking at federation; looking at shared services; and lots of other things that can help them to be more sustainable. But I think that there are some things that we have offered help with and will continue to do that. We have been drawing up a paper, which again I talked about at the Primary Schools Association, about how we can help as a Council and will continue to do that. I also thank my colleague, Ian Pittock, who attends the Schools' Forum, for how much work he has done.

88.2 Ken Miall asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:

Question

At our last allocation of new school children to primary schools in Earley, we had a number of upset parents that felt they had been unfairly treated.

Can you give us assurance that the methods we are using to calculate the intake of children are significantly robust enough to project the correct numbers in the future and can we be sure that the expertise to do this would not be lost when we have staff turnover?

Answer

Throughout this process, those Earley parents who were not successful in getting a local school place last September have been forefront in my concern and I have been regularly seeking assurance that parents were well engaged in finding solutions. I would also like to thank all of the Councillors in Earley for their commitment and hard work that they have been doing in order to help those parents.

Our papers set out a plan this evening which we believe is well evidenced and drawing from a range of different data sources. Pages 113 and 114 of the agenda show the different evidence bases that we are using now in order to do that. This builds on our Primary Strategy of three years ago which well established need and delivered the required school places that were needed. In particular our approach now reflects the specific context of our well established communities such as Earley and their demographic changes. This sets the new standard for our school place planning. This is not about individual staff but a consistent Council wide approach and a protocol going forward.

88.3 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question:

Question

I read with interest your proposed consultation on the Library offer. While I was at the University of Reading self-service was introduced at the Library and it greatly increased usage. Do you foresee this increasing usage at our libraries?

Answer

As the population of Wokingham Borough continues to grow all of the proposals contained in the Library Offer are aimed at increasing both the capacity and the usage of our Library Service. It is good to hear that you have experience of self-service increasing the availability of the library when people need it in the University and I look forward to you contributing to the consultation when it comes out.

We have seen in recent years the national picture in Wokingham libraries quite a contrast to the more general picture outside Wokingham. Our libraries are bucking the trend of usage because of some of the innovations that we have brought forward. We have had small increases in usage each year of about 0.5% and we have also had a 2% increase in registered active users that are actually using the service. That on the backdrop of national usage; which is actually declining at 2%.

So we are very passionate about our libraries and we would like to hear a lot of ideas from residents on how we might improve the service and we know that in order to continue to

deliver a successful library service we need to continue to explore new ways of extending it, improving it, and making it more accessible to people.

So it is good to hear your comments and I hope you will put something into the consultation.

Supplementary Question

Yes I will be submitting a response to the consultation, of course. Throughout reading the consultation I have actually reached out to library districts in the United States and one of the areas in the documents that came with the Executive pack was around investing in technology and also income generation. One of the things they have done in the United States, the specific library district I spoke to, they have actually invested in a 3D printer and it has brought in such income to the library district that they are currently investigating getting more in by community backed projects in order to get more around libraries in the whole district. So would you support investing in technology to bring in income?

Supplementary Answer

Yes we have invested in a lot of ancillary ways of generating income because as you know we are the lowest funded authority in the country so we don't have money to throw around the place. For example in the libraries we have introduced cafes. In Woodley library we have recently introduced a small meeting room that local residents can rent for having business meetings. We have refurbished all the IT kit in the libraries; we have introduced wi-fi; and are continuing to look at other related technical innovation that means that we can actually increase the income of the libraries as well. So we will take that idea back and add it to the pile of other ideas. All ideas for generating income that are related to libraries, rather than tap dancing, are very welcome.

88.4 David Lee asked the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities the following question:

Question

Regarding Item 89.9: A number of residents are concerned that this development will not yield a developer contribution in the form of Affordable Houses to the Borough due to the viability of the scheme. Would the Executive Member please explain why this is and confirm whether or not the financial viability of this scheme will be examined by an independent expert?

Answer

As you know this Council is committed to the provision of affordable housing within Wokingham and has been investing significantly in providing new affordable homes across the Borough; such as the £12m new development at Phoenix Avenue, which is providing 62 units of affordable housing and other such schemes that are coming forward.

I am here though tonight representing the Council in their role as a developer and can only comment from this perspective.

In our role as developer we are treated by the Council in the same manner as any private developer would be and undergo the same rigorous review and assessment as other major development schemes across the Borough which will be part of the consideration of the Planning Committee.

Wokingham desperately needs regenerating, with a need for a better mix and variety of shops and better leisure facilities. It also needs far better quality public spaces which can be used to help differentiate Wokingham; with things like bigger markets and community events.

All of this is being paid for and delivered as part of the regeneration project.

Over and above the £5m we will be paying towards infrastructure improvements through CIL, SANG and replacement of the tennis courts. We are also investing millions in elements which don't necessarily contribute monetarily towards the scheme but give so much back to the local community. This is an investment at a scale far above that which a normal developer would ever consider as part of a private scheme.

That's things like millions being spent to move the existing road so that: the open space can be connected to the pedestrianised spaces; adding resilience to the local road network; creating new public spaces for events and socialising; improving the park; installing services such as water and power to help improve local events; and creating a bigger and better play area.

We are convinced our proposals offer the right balance of development for the site and for the town centre in order to deliver a viable and successful regeneration for Wokingham which will support residents and attract people to the town for years to come.

Supplementary question

I think there are a lot of concerns about the whole viability side and while I don't think it is appropriate that the viability study is made public I think the conclusions of the Independent Examiner should be, and I believe they will be in the Officer's report. The Town Council, which is very involved with this would appreciate, I think, if they could have a copy of the conclusion when it is available so they can alleviate any fears that residents may have?

Supplementary Answer provided by Keith Baker

Yes, basically we will make sure that you have got a copy of that.

To clarify the significance of the answer from us relating to being a developer. The Executive does not govern any of the decisions of the Planning Committee which is an independent and quasi-judicial body which will consider every aspect of the application independently of this Executive and on its merits.

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

Question

Regarding Item 89.9: Residents have been concerned about the loss of trees in Elms Field and the loss of the children's Play Ground. Can the Executive Member responsible please let us know what the position regarding this will be and future planting?

Answer

Just as the Chairman has said I am here tonight representing the Council in their role as developer and can only comment from this perspective.

A bigger and better children's play area, not a loss, is at the heart of the new proposals.

Although the existing play area attracts local children and families the offer is limited. New local playgrounds such as the one at Dinton Pastures, and at the Finchampstead Baptist Centre in Gorse Ride, have shown what can be achieved with improved modern equipment and design.

We believe the play area at Elms Field could become just as great a space and, should we secure planning consent this spring, will be working with local families and children on creating exciting designs for the new space; which is about 40% bigger than the area currently used for play equipment in the existing park.

On trees we have worked carefully with professional arboriculturalists and other interested parties throughout the process to identify the best solution for retaining as many of the trees as possible and this can be seen within the new designs which include the retention of many of the best specimen trees such as the willow to the south, the large elm in the centre of the play area and two of the best trees next to Virgin Active. We are also retaining the existing avenue of trees which currently line either side of Elms Road and, with the shift of the road to the far side of the park, will now be located within the open space. Also the old hedge along Wellington Road will be almost entirely retained.

The majority of the trees that are being removed are of relatively poor quality or have a limited life span. We have included proposals for replacement planting of semi mature trees across the scheme to mitigate those we are losing, concentrating our proposals on improved quality and biodiversity to support local wildlife and use of native species.

A large number of trees seen as being 'within the park' actually sit outside of the park boundaries and we have worked carefully on the designs to ensure they are not impacted on and proper mitigation practices, such as root boundary distances, have been taken into account in the proposals. In this we have been helped by the District Veteran Tree Association whose input has been invaluable as it was when we worked to find sites across the Borough for 60 commemorative oak trees planted for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

We will continue to consult and work to provide the best possible tree and landscape environment in Elms Field.

Supplementary question

In respect of the playground could you please confirm that locally interested groups will also be involved?

Supplementary answer

Yes as I said we are planning that children and families will be involved in getting to the detail of it and we will bring forward ideas that have worked in other places but there will still be choices. You may recall that when we replace some of the equipment in some of the play areas in Norreys ward we did just that and it was very successful and people's ideas did change the plans that we had.

89. COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES

(Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Anthony Pollock declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report relating to an update on the operational position of the companies for the period to 31 December 2015, the budget monitoring position for the

month ending 30 November 2015 and the Wokingham Housing Limited Business Plan for 2015.

The Leader of Council highlighted a number of areas from the report including that Optalis had been successful in acquiring new business. With regard to WHL Councillor Baker informed Members that the developers were now on site at Phoenix Avenue and that the tendering process for Fosters was reaching completion.

Councillor Haitham Taylor congratulated Anju Bhatti for winning the Social Worker of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award. Councillor Haitham Taylor also highlighted that the turnover rate of Optalis was at an all-time low at 18% and queried what was being done to reduce this figure further and if Optalis had a retention policy? Councillor McGhee-Sumner responded that Optalis work very hard at retaining staff and the new Managing Director was intending to meet with staff regularly to understand their issues. It was also noted that Optalis was one of the best payers in the locality.

Councillor Pollock, in his role as non-Executive director of Optalis, went through the process that had been followed to aid recruitment and stated that the turnover rates last year were close to 40% so to get down to 18% and recruit 105 people was a very good achievement.

Councillor Jorgensen highlighted the complements that the Council was receiving from other local authorities; including the fact that Optalis had been approached with a view to running an extra care service in Oxfordshire and was also providing consultancy to other councils. She felt it was great credit to Optalis that other councils were buying their expertise which had the added benefit of helping assist with the cost for Wokingham residents. The Leader asked that Councillor Pollock convey the Executive's congratulations to the Managing Director and her team.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 November 2015 be noted;
- 2) the operational update for the period to 31 December 2015 be noted.

90. REVENUE MONITORING 2015/16 - END OF DECEMBER 2015

The Executive considered a report setting out the position as at the end of December 2015 and the forecast outturn position of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools Block and the Council's investment portfolio.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance advised the meeting that the projected outturn was just under £400k. He highlighted a number of areas that had contributed to this figure including the fact that in Children's Services, a £200k Government grant had unexpectedly ended after last year's budget had been set, and there was an increase in placements of nearly £500k. Councillor Pollock asked Executive Members to consider ways the overspend could be reduced by the end of the financial year.

Councillor Pollock was also pleased to advise Members that reserves were projected at around £10m which would be particularly important in the difficult funding environment that the Council currently found itself in.

RESOLVED: That the forecast outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of forecast balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Schools Block and the Authority's investment portfolio be noted.

91. CAPITAL MONITORING 2015/16 - END OF DECEMBER 2015

The Executive considered a report setting out the position of the Capital budget as at the end of December 2015 and requesting the allocation of S106 monies to various projects as listed in the agenda.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance was pleased to report that the Capital Programme was essentially on budget for this year however there would be elements of schemes which would require some money being carried forward to the next financial year. Councillor Pollock highlighted the capital expenditure monitoring sheet, attached at Appendix A to the report, and the release of s106 developer contributions for Wheatfield Primary School and Wokingham Medical Centre projects as outlined in Appendix B.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Capital Monitoring report for the third quarter of 2015/16, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- 2) the allocation of S106 to projects as listed in Appendix B to the report be approved.

92. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Executive considered a report from the Chief Finance Officer setting out issues and risks to be considered when setting the council tax for 2016/17 and agreeing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance went through the report and explained that the funding settlement for 2016/17 had been particularly harsh on a large number of local authorities, including Wokingham. Councillor Pollock drew Members' attention to the 'Analysis of Spending Power Changes' section of the report and explained that the £13m Government grant, that had been expected to be withdrawn over the life of this Parliament, would now be withdrawn in the next two years with a small amount in year 3.

Councillor Pollock went on to say that the Council had now moved into a "negative Government grant" which would be taken away from business rates. This would mean that of the £63m, currently raised through business rates, by 2020 the Council would only keep around £6m of this amount. He also highlighted the changes to the New Homes Bonus and the implications of this change.

The Executive Member for Children's Services drew Members' attention to the fact that the Education Services Grant would reduce in 2016/17 and cease entirely over the spending review period; which would equate to a loss in grant income of over £1.5m over the next four years. The Council did however still need to provide a large number of services to its schools and the loss of this money would have an impact on the provision of these services.

The Leader of Council advised that the poor settlement had brought the six Berkshire unitary authorities together to physically go and lobby the Minister. In addition John Redwood had been lobbying the Secretary of State on Wokingham's behalf.

RESOLVED: That the Chief Finance Officer's (CFO) report be noted and the issues contained within, including the local government finance settlement and the sections on key risks, be considered when setting the council tax for 2016/17 and agreeing the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

93. PRIMARY SCHOOL PLANNING STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report including a proposed Primary School Planning Strategy which sets out the need for new primary school places over the period 2016 to 2018 to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet this need.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised the meeting that last year there had been some areas where it had been difficult to meet the demand for school places eg Earley which had seen an unprecedented change in house occupation patterns. Therefore through the Strategy it was planned over the coming years to provide: up to 315 places in Earley; 315 places in Woodley; and up to 210 places in the South West. This would be achieved by the expansion of existing schools and new school place provision provided by the addition of seven new schools. It was noted that a school at Montague Park was due to open in September 2016, and one at Matthews Green was anticipated to be open in 2018. Further schools would be built in South Wokingham, Spencer's Wood, Shinfield West and two in the Arborfield SDL.

Councillor Haitham Taylor thanked the Earley Parents Group and those Members involved in helping to formulate the Strategy and highlighted that consultation had taken place with parents, residents, schools and other stakeholders. Members noted that the Strategy had also taken account of highways constraints and restrictions of school sites.

Councillor Jorgensen commented that she welcomed the provision of extra school places, especially in Earley, as she felt it was really important that local parents are able to send their children to local schools. In addition to the benefits for parents and children it would also reduce traffic congestion. Councillor Jorgensen also wanted to ensure that the Council would continue to crack down on fraudulent school admissions and robustly fine people. Councillor Haitham Taylor responded that the School Admission Arrangements report, which was due to be discussed at the next Executive, included more robust wording around applications from parents who owned/lived at two properties.

RESOLVED: That the Primary School Planning Strategy, as attached to the report, be approved.

94. PRIMARY STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PHASE 1

The Executive considered a report setting out Phase 1 of the Primary Strategy Implementation Plan which would ensure that there were sufficient school places to discharge the Council's duties under the Education Act 1996.

The Executive Member for Children's Services explained that the report provided further detail on the expansion of selected schools in the areas of Woodley, Earley and the south west and set out how many places would be required, how they would be delivered and what the indicative costs could be. The report also highlighted the fact that it was better to increase school places in a school that had a small planned admission number as this could improve its viability.

It was noted that capital works had also been considered as part of the Implementation Plan as it was very important that such works did not impinge on teaching and learning. Councillor Haitham Taylor highlighted those schools which were proposed for expansion and which had been chosen for various reasons including those where traffic and parking issues could be minimised and also because they were schools that provided good quality education and were popular with parents.

Councillor Pollock asked if reassurance could be given around the Shinfield proposal and whether Ryeish Green had sufficient space and also if the physical works would be completed on time? Councillor Haitham Taylor responded that there were currently two different options available. The first option was to use of the former 6th form block which was not currently big enough to accommodate one form of entry but with some temporary accommodation alongside it would be sufficient prior to moving on to the new school site when it became available. The second option was working with Oakbank Secondary School, which was on the existing site, as they school had some spare accommodation which subject to negotiations might be available instead of the 6th form block.

Councillor Pollock also highlighted the many traffic and access issues arising from the proposal and wanted to ensure that these would be addressed. Councillor Haitham Taylor confirmed that the provider of the school would need to put forward a travel plan which would require Council agreement.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the selection of the school sites as listed in the report, to meet primary school sufficiency for 2016/2017, be approved;
- 2) the commissioning of work to carry out the detailed feasibility, and subject to approval of final capital bids and business cases, to deliver the necessary works be authorised.

95. COUNCIL PLAN 2014-17 - UPDATE

The Executive considered a report outlining the progress that had been made towards achieving the key actions of the Council's service delivery as set out in the Council Plan 2014-2017.

The Leader of Council reminded Members that in 2014 the Council Plan was approved which encompassed the vision, priorities and the principles and the report being considered at this meeting was the first update of the Plan.

Councillor Ross felt that taking account of current financial difficulties the document was actually a success story as the Council was still managing to develop the Borough, including increasing housing, and provide new facilities.

RESOLVED: That the update of the Council Plan be approved.

96. MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

The Executive considered a proposed model for Community Asset Transfers which was intended to deliver a more effective use of community assets in the future and in particular avoid arrangements that do not generate an optimal position for the Council.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities thanked Councillor Mark Ashwell for the work he had undertaken over the last year to develop the proposed model.

In the past there had been problems transferring assets from the Borough to either town or parish councils or community groups and by using this model it should be possible to speed up the process.

It was noted that in order to enable leases of 14-30 years to be delegated to the Director of Finances and Resources in consultation with specified Members a change to the Council's Constitution would be required..

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the aim to transfer assets identified through Area Reviews to Towns, Parishes or Community organisations through a Model for Community Asset Transfer to be approved by the Task and Finish Group and presented to Executive in March 2016 be approved;
- 2) it be recommended to Full Council, via the Constitution Review Working Group, that a change be made to the Constitution whereby following consultation with Services and Ward Members, approval for Community Asset Transfers under leases of 14 - 30 years be delegated to the Director of Finances and Resources in consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities, the Executive Member of the current service and Local Ward Members;
- 3) it be noted that the use of these delegated powers is to be based on the overall financial benefit to the Council and to enable the best community use of property assets. In cases where it appears that a proposal is not in the Council's best financial interest and/or the capital value of an individual asset exceeds £250,000, then they will be referred to Executive for approval.

97. ELMS FIELD DEVELOPMENT - PAYMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE CONTRIBUTIONS

The Executive considered a report setting out the proposed approach to securing financial contributions from the Elms Field development scheme to contribute towards off-site scheme mitigation measures.

The Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities informed the meeting that the report was seeking agreement to pay the community infrastructure levy in order to help fund infrastructure projects which contribute towards the mitigation of the impact of the Elms Field development.

RESOLVED: That the payment of monies from the Elms Field redevelopment scheme to the Local Planning Authority, in accordance with the values and timing of payments set out in the report, be agreed.

98. REQUEST FOR THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF FOOTPATH 4 REMENHAM (PART)

The Executive considered a report relating to a request from the organisers of the Henley Festival of Music and the Arts for the closure of Footpath No. 4 Remenham during the building and dismantling of the Festival stage.

Members were advised that work undertaken by the Working Group had taken away some of the objections to the request, which was received on an annual basis, and that legally the matter did not have to be brought to the Executive but because of the nature of objections received previously it had been decided that it should be discussed at a public

meeting. The Leader of Council asked that consideration be given to revisiting this decision.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the making of an Order for the closure of Footpath Remenham No 4, for a closure of an 80m section of the footpath for the set up and de rig of the Festival stage from Monday 4 July to Wednesday 6 July 2016 inclusive and from Monday 11 July to Tuesday 12 July 2016 inclusive be approved;
- 2) within the closure a 488m section for evening performances from Wednesday 6 July to Sunday 10 July 2016 inclusive, be included under Section 16A of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, subject to the receipt of the requisite consent of the Secretary of State for Transport.

99. LIBRARY OFFER - CONSULTATION

The Executive considered a report setting out a proposed Library Offer which establishes a purpose and direction of travel for the library service and a preferred delivery model for that Offer which establishes a new hub and spoke model for library services.

The Executive Member for Resident Services advised Members that the Council's libraries were bucking the national trend with a 0.5% increase in visits which was in contrast to a 2% decline nationally; and a 2% increase in active users which now amounted to 24,000 with 594,000 books issued in the past year. In addition more e-books were being issued and more events were taking place which covered amongst others children's reading, craft and poetry. Councillor Jorgensen paid tribute to the staff that ran the libraries for their innovative ideas to expand services which were very popular and contributed to the increased usage.

It was noted that the intention was to carry out an eight week consultation with residents on both the Library Offer and the delivery model, including options for increasing the accessibility and usage of the libraries further. Councillor Jorgensen highlighted a number of these options which including technological innovations to increase opening hours without actually increasing the costs of running the libraries and stated that she would be very interested in receiving ideas from residents and users about what would make them use the library more.

Following a query by the Leader of Council about issues that could arise with self-service libraries it was confirmed that this model was used extensively in Scandinavia and several local authorities in the UK eg Trafford, Peterborough and Brighton had also used this model and found it to be successful.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) residents be consulted on the proposed Library Offer which sets out what residents can expect and enjoy from the Wokingham Borough Council Library Service;
- 2) residents be consulted on the proposed Delivery Model, including implementing the capability for some self-service (phase 1) and unstaffed opening (phase 2) within the Wokingham Borough Council Library Service.

100. RISK MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND GUIDANCE

The Executive considered a report, as recommended by the Audit Committee, setting out a proposed Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Policy and supporting guidance which would provide the framework for sustaining effective management of risk at the Council.

Members were advised that the proposed Policy included a couple of minor changes to ensure that the document meets best practice standards eg clarifying the roles and responsibilities for Members and Officers in managing risk.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the Enterprise Risk Management Policy be approved; and
- 2) the Enterprise Risk Management Guidance be approved.

101. OPTALIS CONTRACT

This item was deferred to a future meeting.