

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON 24 MARCH 2016 FROM 7.30 PM TO 10.35 PM

### Members Present

Councillors: Parry Batth (Mayor), Keith Baker, Laura Blumenthal, Chris Bowring, Prue Bray, UllaKarin Clark, Gary Cowan, Lindsay Ferris, Michael Firmager, Guy Grandison, Kate Haines, Mike Haines, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Halsall, Tim Holton, Philip Houldsworth, Dianne King, John Jarvis, Norman Jorgensen, Pauline Jorgensen, David Lee, Abdul Loyes, Tom McCann, Julian McGhee-Sumner, Ken Miall, Philip Mirfin, Ian Pittock, Barrie Patman, Anthony Pollock, Nick Ray, Malcolm Richards, Angus Ross, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Singleton, David Sleight, Chris Smith, Wayne Smith, Rob Stanton, Alison Swaddle, Paul Swaddle, Simon Weeks and Shahid Younis

### 77. MINUTE SILENCE

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Mayor paid tribute to the victims of the Brussels attacks and led the Council in a minute of silence.

### 78. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Mark Ashwell, Alistair Auty, Mike Gore, Pauline Helliard-Symons, John Kaiser, Stuart Munro, Bob Pitts, Beth Rowland, Bill Soane and Bob Wyatt.

### 79. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 February 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### 80. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Chris Bowring, Tim Holton, Malcolm Richards, Chris Singleton, Wayne Smith and Simon Weeks declared Personal Interests in the amendment proposed to Agenda Item 88.2 Motion 379 on the grounds that discussion could have referred to the Elms Field and they were all members of the Planning Committee. None of these Members voted on this item or participated in the debate.

Councillors Chris Bowring, Malcolm Richards, Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey, Chris Singleton, and Simon Weeks declared Personal Interests in the amendment proposed to Agenda Item 88.3 Motion 380 on the grounds that discussion could have referred to the Elms Field and they were all members of the Planning Committee. None of these Members voted on this item or participated in the debate.

### 81. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

#### 81.1 Imogen Shepherd-Dubey asked the following question of the Leader of the Council:

At the Borough Council meeting on 18th February you claimed in your budget speech that there is "£2.5 million of annual income from the regeneration of the town centre."

I have been unable to find any reference in the Medium Term Financial Plan to any annual income, let alone £2.5 million, from Wokingham town centre regeneration. In fact, the papers show that on top of all the lump sum costs, which amount to over £50 million, Wokingham town centre regeneration will cost at least £700,000 a year for the next three

years, not bring in income. What is the justification for your claim that there is – or will be in the future - £2.5 million annual income from the town centre regeneration?

**Answer**

The Medium Term Financial Plan outlines the Revenue Service Budgets for the financial year 2016/17. This shows the revenue produced from the existing regeneration assets for example the Peach Place Portfolio. This does not therefore identify income in future years.

Revenue income is not shown for future years within the Medium Term Financial Plan as the MTFP is demonstrating future capital and revenue spend only.

Capital investment in future years, as set out in the Capital Programme, will produce annual revenue income from the completed regeneration assets. The reference in the budget speech on 18th February to £2.5m was a net income after deducting financing costs and assuming retention of all assets and based on the forecast rental schedules.

**Supplementary Question**

In two years' time the Council's Government funding will have fallen off a cliff. At that point you plan on knocking down large parts of Peach Street. That means less income for the Council from shop rents and less income for the Council from shared business rates. What will be the effect to the Council's income for the loss of shops rents and business rates due to Wokingham Borough Council's regeneration between now and 2019?

**Supplementary Answer**

Clearly I do not have that information at my fingertips but we will get it for you and I look forward when that happens to getting some alternative proposals from the Liberal Democrat group in this Chamber. It will be quite a rarity but I am looking forward to it.

**82. PETITIONS**

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

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

Mr Patrick Heather	Mr Patrick Heather presented a petition of 8208 signatures regarding Hare Hatch Sheeplands Garden Centre, London Road, Hare Hatch.  <b>To be forwarded to the Executive Member for Planning and Highways</b>
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**83. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor informed Members that His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex and Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex had visited and had heard about Wokingham's Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme. The Mayor encouraged Members to undertake a challenge as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Diamond Challenge.

The Mayor had also attended mock trials at Reading Crown Court which had been sponsored by the High Sheriff of Berkshire. He was pleased to announce that The Holt School and St Crispin's School had taken first and second place respectively and would take part in the finals in May.

#### **84. PROPOSED LAND DRAINAGE BYELAWS**

The Council received and considered a report on proposed Land Drainage Byelaws, as set out on Agenda pages 33 to 48.

Angus Ross encouraged Members to participate in the local consultation stage.

Prue Bray commented that enforcement of the byelaws was vital but no money had been set aside for this enforcement.

It was proposed by Angus Ross and seconded by Philip Houldsworth that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) it be formally resolved to adopt the proposed land drainage byelaws as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) the sealing thereof be authorised and the carrying out of the public consultation phase be approved;
- 3) the proposed byelaws together with any unresolved objections received thereto be submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation.

#### **85. RE-DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACE**

The Council received and considered a report regarding the redesignation of a Polling Place in Bulmershe and Whitegates for the European Union Referendum scheduled on 23 June 2016, as set out on Agenda pages 49 to 52.

Tom McCann suggested it be made clear at the Earley Home Guard Social Club polling station for the Election on 5 May 2016 that it would not be the polling station for the European Union Referendum on 23 June 2016 and that the polling station would be at Bulmershe Leisure Centre. He also suggested that signage be put up outside Bulmershe Leisure Centre. Alison Swaddle and Pauline Jorgensen indicated that as much as possible would be done to ensure that the public knew where to go to vote for the European Union Referendum.

It was proposed by Pauline Jorgensen and seconded by Alison Swaddle that the recommendation set out in the report be approved.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council agree that Bulmershe Leisure Centre be designated as the Polling Place for Bulmershe and Whitegates ward, instead of Earley Home Guard Social Club, for the European Union Referendum scheduled on 23 June 2016.

#### **86. CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

The Council considered proposed changes to the Constitution as set out on Agenda pages 53 to 92 relating to voting, Deputy Executive Members, the Code of Conduct for Councillors, the Member/Officer Protocol and the Scheme of Delegation for Officers.

It was proposed by Paul Swaddle and seconded by Prue Bray that the recommendations set out in the report be approved.

Tom McCann commented that in the last five years there had been over three hundred amendments to the Constitution and that it was often difficult for Members to keep up-to-date with the many changes. He proposed that apart from urgent items, updates to the Constitution be brought to Council on an annual basis.

Paul Swaddle emphasised that many of the changes presented were necessary as a result of legislative or policy change. Changes were being made to make the Constitution more flexible and more information was being moved to appendices. However, this would take time.

Tom McCann proposed the following amended recommendations which were seconded by Prue Bray.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- 5) Chapter 11.3 – Scheme of Delegation to Officers  
A new Rule to be inserted as 11.3.6g)ii) as follows and the numbering of 11.3.6g)ii-v) amended accordingly:

“Approval of Community Asset Transfers under leases of between 14-30 years following consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities, the Executive Member with responsibility for the relevant service area and local Ward Members.” **and**

- 6) ***agrees that the Constitution Review Working Group should create a rolling one year forward plan for Constitutional changes and bring Constitutional amendments to the Council for decision only once annually, apart from urgent items.***

Upon being put to the vote the amendment to the recommendations was lost.

Upon the original recommendations being put to the vote it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Council approves the following amendments to the relevant sections of the Council’s Constitution, as put forward by the Constitution Review Working Group:

- 1) Rule 4.2.15 Voting - Delete the last line of the second paragraph of Rule 4.2.15;  
2) Rule 5.1.6 Deputy Executive Members

The following additional wording to be added to the first paragraph of Rule 5.1.6:

“The Leader may also remove any Member from their role as Deputy Executive Member.”

- 3) Chapter 9.2 – Code of Conduct for Councillors

Guidance on Bullying and Intimidation (to be included as Appendix C to Chapter 9.2) and the following wording to be added to Rule 9.2.8.2:

“Supporting Guidance on Bullying and Intimidation can be found at Appendix C.”

4) Chapter 9.3 – Member/Officer Protocol

Revised versions of the following documents:

- Chapter 9.4 – Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy;
- Chapter 9.5 – Whistleblowing Policy and Guidance;
- Chapter 9.6 – Anti Bribery Policy;
- Chapter 9.7 – Anti Money Laundering Policy;
- Chapter 9.8 – Prosecution and Sanction Policy.

5) Chapter 11.3 – Scheme of Delegation to Officers

A new Rule to be inserted as 11.3.6g)ii) as follows and the numbering of 11.3.6g)ii-v) amended accordingly:

“Approval of Community Asset Transfers under leases of between 14-30 years following consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities, the Executive Member with responsibility for the relevant service area and local Ward Members.”

**87. ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2015-16**

The Council considered the annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as set out within the Agenda.

Tim Holton took Members through the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the municipal year. He thanked the committee members for their involvement and hard work and Democratic Services for their support. Members were encouraged to submit scrutiny review suggestions and to ask questions at committee meetings.

Lindsay Ferris emphasised that the committees had undertaken some good work over the year.

It was proposed by Tim Holton and seconded by Michael Firmager that the report be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee be noted.

**88. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

The Council considered the Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report 2015/16 as set out within the Agenda.

Keith Baker informed Members that the Board had participated in a Local Government Association Health and Wellbeing Board Peer Review in March 2016. The review had comprised three Health and Wellbeing Boards: Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire

and it was the first time that a multi-Board review had been carried out. Feedback was awaited.

Prue Bray commented that the Board had looked at some complex matters over the year, including the Better Care Fund.

Charlotte Haitham Taylor highlighted the partnership working which had been undertaken regarding children and young people. A joint Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group and Wokingham Borough Council Emotional Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015- 2017 had been developed and the Director of Public Health's annual report had focused in particular on children's health and some of the inequalities around children. In addition a joint 0-25 Disability Strategy would be developed through the Health and Wellbeing Board.

It was proposed by Keith Baker and seconded by Prue Bray that the report be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report from the Chairman of the Health and Wellbeing Board be noted.

#### **89. AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

The Council considered the annual report of the Audit Committee as set out within the Agenda.

Guy Grandison thanked the committee members, officers, Internal Audit and External Audit, Ernst & Young. The Committee had continued to look at retrospective purchase orders and they had reduced to a more satisfactory level. He highlighted the update that Members had received on the Highway Network Asset project.

It was proposed by Guy Grandison and seconded by Paul Swaddle that the report be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report from the Chairman of the Audit Committee be noted.

#### **90. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

The Council considered the Standards Committee Annual Report 2015/16 as set out within the agenda.

Rob Stanton emphasised that 2015/16 had seen a reduction in the level of complaint activity against Members.

Rob Stanton went on to pay tribute to John Bingham, former Independent Person, who had passed away during the year. He thanked the committee members and officers for their hard work and support and encouraged all Members to attend any forthcoming training on matters such as the Code of Conduct.

Prue Bray expressed concern regarding the transparency of the complaints process, in particular in relation to circumstances where a Councillor could be found in breach of the Code of Conduct and have had sanctions imposed on them and the outcome and their identity not be made public. Suggestions for changes would be made in future.

It was proposed by Rob Stanton and seconded by Ken Miall that the report be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report from the Chairman of the Standards Committee be noted.

## **91. REPORTS FROM MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Council considered the annual reports from Members appointed to outside bodies as set out within the Agenda.

Keith Baker emphasised the importance of the outside bodies which provided facilities and services to residents.

Prue Bray highlighted that not all outside body representatives had provided reports. Parry Batth encouraged those who had not yet submitted reports to do so.

It was proposed by Parry Batth and seconded by Keith Baker that reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

Upon being put to the vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the reports from Members appointed to Outside Bodies be noted.

## **92. STATEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AND DEPUTY EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

### **Keith Baker, Leader of the Council**

As this is the last full Council meeting of the current year I thought I would concentrate on the key events during my year of leadership.

This time last year the whole issue of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was explosively exposed in nearby Oxfordshire. When this happened we all posed the same question 'Could it happen here?' After all, we are all corporate parents. As soon as the story broke I commissioned a review focusing on how well WBC were responding to the emerging concerns about CSE prevention. This was led by Bernie McNally, a well-respected independent practitioner in this area. The report was published in November as part of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda.

When I took on the leadership role of this Council one of my priorities was and continues to be the structural aspects of our companies. Over the last few years I have sponsored significant changes in many areas. The cornerstone of these changes has been formalising the governance structure so that everyone knows exactly how the decision making process works. This governance operational protocol is a living document and is continually evolving as events unfold. I have pushed for greater transparency with Board Chairmen now having their own slot on these agendas so they can update all Councillors on developments. Having a formal process is a great improvement but success will depend in part on who our Non-Executive Directors are. My strategy has been to attempt to match Councillors' experience with the requirement of the Non-Executive Director role. This has meant a healthy degree of churn as this process was completed. We are practically there with the current appointments. The most recent change is around remuneration of our Non-Executive Directors. In the past the Leader decided, albeit in isolation, what that should be. I have always been uncomfortable with this so I asked the

Independent Remuneration Panel if they could take on this role. I am pleased to say that they agreed with my suggestion and I look forward to their first full report. However, to assist this process in the future, some form of performance evaluation needed to be in place. Following my request a process was developed and all Non-Executive Directors are currently going through their first evaluation.

The other big piece of work that I have overseen is the budget. In October we thought we had a good grounding of what the Government settlement was likely to be. I have long felt that we could do a lot more to engage residents in explaining the financial position that this Council is in. With this in mind we embarked on a series of public engagement meetings across the Borough. These five meetings were the first time we had carried out such activity and we intend to repeat this next year, learning from the first experience.

We all know that this has been financially the most difficult year probably in living memory. Remember we are the lowest funded authority in the land. Over the Christmas period and beyond, I worked closely with John Redwood, our MP, other Berkshire Leaders, the LGA Conservative Group Leader and even managed to fit in a meeting with a Minister. Our collective lobbying succeeded with two years of transitional funding to help plan our finances through 2019 and 2020.

Throughout this last year I have also attended many meetings, ranging from Board meetings of our companies through to SDL Community Forums. I strongly believe that good leadership is where you do get out the office to see what is happening in the Borough. It has been invaluable to fully understand where things are going well and more importantly where they are not. This helps me shape the sorts of improvements that I believe are required. It also allows me to step in when residents have a particular issue which they believe is not actually being dealt with to their satisfaction.

Finally, I know several of you are up for re-election or are retiring in May. For those who are retiring, can I say on behalf of the Council, many thanks for all your efforts and your contributions to make this Council a great one. For those seeking re-election, can I wish you good luck and maybe see you at the Annual Council.

### **Pauline Jorgensen, Executive Member for Resident Services**

At the last Full Council I said we were working to reduce costs and increase accessibility and improve the efficiency of our support services, so I would like to give you an update. As part of our drive to improve officer understanding of residents' priorities we held another successful customer service event in Wokingham Market Place. At this event officers talked to residents about their experience of the Council and answered their questions. We also took the opportunity to capture details of any issues they had and passed them back to the service departments for resolution. Items of particular focus for residents this time were improving recycling opportunities and issues with street cleaning and drainage. As we did last year we will hold further sessions in other towns in the Borough and really look forward to talking directly to our residents.

I mentioned last time also that our new customer accounts service had launched which enabled people to report issues and file requests online and to track issue resolutions. To date 2,800 people have registered on the new portal and we have automated an astonishing 7,900 processes using the new self-service forms. I would like to really encourage everybody in the Borough to create an online account. It really makes things a lot easier and a lot more efficient and you can actually see what is going on with your request.

Garden waste renewals are the latest edition to the self-service forms. So far 60% of customers have renewed and 70% of them have done so online, saving manual intervention. Highways Services will be the next area to be integrated into the portal.

Our IT service has successfully migrated to Northgate with the journey to Microsoft Cloud nearing completion. That saves £500,000 of IT costs in 2016/17 and in total since 2014 our IT costs have reduced by 25% despite increased automation. Quite an achievement for our IT team.

Finally turning to libraries; a couple of updates. We have found a new home for the Arborfield library at the Royal British Legion. We have organised a Library Festival for April which I am looking forward to, with a range of Arts and Crafts for a celebration of Shakespeare's 400<sup>th</sup> birthday. We are about to introduce our first 3D printing service in Wokingham Library and we are just about to update our Library Management System which will allow people more modern interfaces with the library and also introduce I Phone and Android apps allowing renewal and reservation of books online. So a couple of interesting technological improvements in libraries and more news to come.

**Angus Ross, Executive Member for Environment:**

I have a number of good news items for Council this evening. First our successful tendering for the grounds maintenance contract will come into reality on 1<sup>st</sup> April when ISS start their ten year contract. The cost to us is reduced and the flexibility of the grass cutting regime to cut when needed and to an appropriate height will be of great benefit to everyone and what our residents said they wanted when we consulted.

We had a very successful litter pick weekend across the Borough last weekend. I do not have the final numbers of people who took part and the amount they lifted but it was the best one yet. I do wish we could get our residents, especially drivers, not to throw their litter out, but to take it home and of course recycle it if possible. I think I had the best find. I found a Rolls Royce wheel trim in a ditch in Wokingham Without. Thank you to all those who turned out and please colleagues promote residents to sign up to Adopt a Street to keep areas litter free all year.

Chalfont Park old tennis courts in Lower Earley are now resurfaced, relit and serving well for ladies netball and Kicks football. They had fallen into disrepair and Section 106 money, not council tax payers' money, enabled this.

We have completed the works to repair the roof of St Crispin's Leisure Centre in Wokingham which had sprung some elusive leaks. Also we have with 1Life, opened a new entrance area to the Carnival Pool, including a gym exercise area and better facilities for people as they arrive.

If I could stray quickly into Royal Berkshire Fire territory, we have seen a continued benefit to residents in and around Wokingham town, with crews being on call for medical emergencies as well as fire. This is at times when the Ambulance Service does not have the resource for emergencies where the first responder can make a difference and I note that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were briefed by South Central Ambulance Service on this. Wokingham Fire Station is the first full time station to provide this service in Berkshire. We all hope that the trial will continue its success and be the first of many to help save lives. The ability to do this, after appreciating that over the last ten or so years the number of fire call outs has halved, the fire crews have been suitably trained

for this new additional role. Next month will see the first anniversary since the new joint fire control for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire went live in the Berkshire Headquarters in Calcot. New equipment and bringing three units into one is both improving service and resilience as well as saving significant sums of public money.

**Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Executive Member for Children's Services:**

This week as you mentioned before Mr Mayor, we were delighted to welcome His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex to our Borough to showcase our Duke of Edinburgh programme that this Council successfully supports on behalf of our schools and also our youth service. His Royal Highness was very generous with his time meeting with lots of our students and young people who are taking part in this scheme. He also talked to many of our dedicated volunteers who give up their time so generously to support not only this but other youth work throughout our community.

It has been a busy couple of weeks in the world of education, with the Secretary of State, the Right Honourable Nicky Morgan MP announcing her White Paper on 17 March 'Education Excellence Everywhere.' Next week the Executive will be considering a policy paper on how this Council can support our local authority schools to become academies over the next four to five years. Currently just nine of our sixty five local authority schools are academies. We are already talking to our Headteachers, our Chairs of Governors, the Diocese and the School Commissioner and we will need both the support of our schools and our families to take us through this transitional period so we can ensure this policy delivers the very best outcomes.

At the same time as these changes there is also a consultation running on the Schools Funding Formula, as if one thing was not enough. Just in case you have forgotten, Wokingham's pupils are the worst funded in the whole of the country, something which has been mentioned many times here before in this Chamber and is something that I and Conservative colleagues have been campaigning for change in central Government. The consultation runs until 17 April and whilst the Council will be sending in a formal response, other Members and in particular Members who sit on Governing bodies may wish to send their separate responses as well to central Government.

Yesterday was a momentous day in our journey into our new school, the Bohunt Secondary School in the South. A small group of parents and future students, who will be starting there this September, and the Headteacher and also some Members, toured the new school. The building works are progressing at a pace and we were able to walk down the corridors, look into what will be the classrooms, go up the stairs and even stand on the roof. It was pure delight and joy etched on to the faces of all of our students who were on the tour, apart from perhaps one small nervous face on the tour of the rooftop. A very positive day.

**Philip Mirfin, Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities:**

I would like to cover two areas of my portfolio this evening, first of all regeneration. The Planning Committee meeting to decide on the outcome of the planning application for the development of Elms Field will be on March 30th. The nine week consultation returned circa 240 responses from individual members of the public as well as a 1300 plus petition. I am pleased to confirm that no major issues have arisen out of the comments submitted within the public consultation. Interest from potential pre lets is high though subject to planning approval. The Highways Stopping Up Order for Peach Place and the CPO process are still ongoing. The public workshop that we held on 27 January received good feedback around the approach to materials and shop fronts. The Traffic Regulation Order

consultation commenced on 28 January in relation to moving the disabled parking spaces and drop off from Rose Street car park on to Rose Street and in front of the Bradbury Centre.

Moving on to the Carnival Pool redevelopment, the decision by South West Trains to close Wokingham Station car park has led to a review of the programme which will allow the Carnival Pool car park to remain open now until 5 June. This does not delay the completion of the new multi storey car park which is still expected for March 2017 and it will help address parking and capacity issues within the wider town centre during this period.

The TRO consultation commenced to open up Wellington House car parks as alternative public short term pay and display car parking whilst the Carnival Pool is shut. Works are being carried out to open these to the public in early April. Preparatory surveys and site clearance are being carried out on the Carnival Pool site in the run up to June when the main construction work will begin on the car park.

Moving now on to community development. Norreys, there has been a process there of contributing to closing the gap. Our Community Development Worker has established a new programme of activities for children attending our Thursday After School Kids Club. Working in partnership with the Library Service colleagues this is now including a monthly visit to Wokingham Library. The children have already had their first visit and despite some initial reservations they thoroughly enjoyed themselves and have given some very positive feedback.

At Rainbow Park they recently had a community Burns Night lunch, if you can have such a thing. The Centre for the Community Action Group volunteers with the support of their Community Development Worker, pulled out all the stops for this and it was themed over a 50s lunch on 30 January.

At Shinfield Rise, the partnership working to support the children and young people, their regular Monday youth group, is now attracting twelve to thirteen children regularly and the session is a collaborative project supported by our Community Development Worker, a WBC Community Warden and a Youth Worker funded by Shinfield Parish Council. Following an approach by our Community Worker, Shinfield Parish Council have agreed to extend the Youth Worker's hours, enabling the sessions to increase from fortnightly to weekly and the numbers have risen as a result.

In Woodley the revitalised Community Association, our Community Development Workers have been working with existing members of the South East Woodley Community Association to re-establish themselves and to attract more members. The first meeting was positive with new members attending and a new constitution is now being drafted and should be agreed at the AGM in April.

Lastly, Gorse Ride, which is inter-community learning. Seven learners attended the first crochet course session recently, attracting a new member of the community to the house. Bracknell and Wokingham College who deliver these courses aim to embed numeracy and literacy skills in all topics to support learners in enhancing their basics.

**Julian McGhee-Sumner, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing:**

As the Leader mentioned earlier this evening the Health and Wellbeing Board was peer reviewed along with the Health and Wellbeing Boards from Reading and West Berkshire,

at the beginning of March. This was the first time the Local Government Association had arranged to peer review three local authorities on the same visit. The purpose of the Peer Review which was led by Chief Executives and senior officers from other local authorities, as well as lead Members who chair Health and Wellbeing Boards in their own areas, was to look to benchmark us against our peers in order that we can become more effective in the role that we play. Although we will not get the written report for another few weeks, the initial feedback we believe did not show up anything that we were not aware of such as not having a dedicated officer resource and how we can better work with our neighbouring authorities, but we do look forward to the final report.

Turning now to the Department of Health. Members will recall that we instigated a Judicial Review along with West Berkshire against the Department of Health following their decision not to honour a commitment to provide additional funding for the extra cases we will be expected to deal with following the Government's decision for us to move from 'Critical' to 'Substantial.' Following discussions with the Department of Health which started over a year ago we withdrew the Judicial Review in anticipation of reaching an agreement with the Department of Health over the level of additional funding required to discharge fully our commitments. Although the progress has been slow, Andy Couldrick, Stuart Rowbotham and I met with the Minister, Alistair Burt, along with our colleagues from West Berkshire, yesterday and we have been promised a decision within the next few weeks. I think the words the Minister used were 'speedy' and I am not quite sure what the definition in Government of 'speedy' is. So hopefully we will get the additional funding that we need but I will of course keep Members updated.

**Malcolm Richards on behalf of John Kaiser, Executive Member for Highways and Planning:**

A subject which is of major concern to residents is planning enforcement and as such the Council is committed to protecting the quality of the environment through ensuring that new development is of the highest quality and the things which allow Wokingham to continue to be one of the best places to live and work in the country are retained and protected. To meet this objective the Council recognises the importance of planning enforcement and is committed to providing an effective and efficient service. While it is encouraged if issues are resolved informally where possible (Government guidelines) through negotiation, this cannot always be achieved and the Council will monitor development and investigate all reported breaches, which amount to some 700 reported cases in Wokingham every year, of which over 50% are not actual breaches. When the reported breaches give rise to planning harm the Council will look to enforce using all the legal powers at its disposal, including prosecutions by the Courts, at the same time looking to recover the costs incurred in pursuing such cases. To ensure that resources are used in the most effective way enforcement has to be prioritised to focus on breaches that result in the greatest harm.

The Council is committed to ensuring the quality of developments in the Borough is of the highest quality and is authorised and as such recognising the importance of planning enforcement to ensure that new development is carried out to a high standard. All alleged breaches of planning control are investigated by the Council, except anonymous complaints, unless the harm resulting is significant. All reports are treated in strictest confidence and where possible the Council will look for voluntary compliance through the removal of the breach. At the same time updates will be provided to interested parties, although due to the time it takes to resolve some issues it may appear nothing is happening for some time as you have to follow the guidelines and the procedure as laid

down by Government guidance and legislation, which means you must give reason at the time for offenders to comply.

The Council also has other powers of enforcement in relation to other legislation such as Highways, Environmental Health, listed buildings and trees. We recognise the importance of proactively monitoring development that goes within the Borough, however the Council issues approximately 3,000 planning permissions every year and these range from small scale extensions to major housing and commercial development. As such the Council works closely with Town and Parish Councils to be its eyes and ears on the ground.

### **93. STATEMENTS FROM COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES**

#### **John Jarvis, Non-Executive Director Wokingham Housing Limited**

Firstly Wokingham Housing Limited. Phoenix is now progressing on schedule. The developers, Hills, have been onsite for three months. The excess debris left after demolition has all been removed. Drainage issues have been addressed and building works have started. At the last count foundations have been dug for about 80% of the site and groundworks are progressing well. Anyone looking over the fence will see that the footings are rising above ground level already. We receive regular photos and these will be added to our website when it goes live in the next few days.

Fosters has taken a major leap forward with the contract following the tender process awarded to R J Leighfields, a Swindon based contractor. This has come in below our estimated bill costs of £6.1 million at £5.96 million. Leighfields are expected to be able to start onsite in April 2016 and the development timetable is programmed at seventy four weeks, delivering the completed scheme by September 2017. At start onsite we will be able to claim 50% of the HCA grant of £1.4 million, hitting the grant claim target we agreed with the HCA. When Fosters commences together with Phoenix, WHL will have over one hundred homes onsite being constructed for residents to start moving in from early 2017.

Our small sites programme has been progressing well with the first three sites included in our small contractor framework tender for quotation. This will further add to the pipeline of homes WHL is working on and delivering for local people. We continue to also seek planning permission for other small sites on Council owned land and hope that more small sites would be tendered through our framework and will be starting onsite during 2016.

Lastly we are beginning to work up schemes that will provide much needed private rented homes in the Borough and hope to progress at least one private rented sector development project late in 2016.

#### **Gary Cowan, Non-Executive Director Loddon Homes Limited**

The Loddon Homes application to register as a for profit registered provider with the Homes and Communities Agency is still ongoing. Feedback received from the Home and Communities Agency largely revolves around concerns about the interpretation of Loddon's interpretation of independence from the Council. We are working hard to satisfy their concerns and as a result we have made some minor amendments to our submission which we believe will satisfy them. Additional extra advice indicated that the registering of Loddon Homes as a profit registered provider, that is a difficult word to use, will provide the Council with the maximum flexibility going forward by taking into consideration the future government housing policy as it evolves. The work to build a business policy and procedures and processes also continues with further policies agreed at our branch March Board meeting. We are also working on developing our new Loddon Homes Business Plan 2016/17 and hope that should be completed next month.

Loddon continue to work with Wokingham Housing Limited on both existing schemes like Phoenix Avenue and Fosters but also on potential other schemes. We are aware of the Government's changing policy and the need to fully understand the implications of this before any final decisions on where schemes best fit in the future, and I will keep the Council fully informed as I get more information.

**Anthony Pollock, Non-Executive Director Optalis:**

My report on Optalis for the last few months. I would like to highlight the following successes by Optalis since my last report at the November Council meeting. We have had another successful year both financially and operationally and I would like to pay tribute to Mette Le Jakobsen who is the Managing Director of Optalis and has been instrumental in leading the delivery of this success.

Optalis is the Council's provider of last resort in respect of adult care services. This means that when a situation occurs where a service has broken down or a service provider has withdrawn from a contract or has ceased to trade for financial reasons that Wokingham Borough Council would instruct Optalis to step in immediately and provide the service on a temporary or permanent basis. This saves the Council from having to seek a new provider through a tendering process which can take a number of months whilst it has to step in itself to ensure the continuation of service to vulnerable residents. Optalis being the provider of last resort therefore ensures a seamless continuation of the service to residents. Yesterday the Council called upon Optalis to step in and take over the services provided by Woodley Age Concern who went into administration this week. In fact I think I have heard they have gone into liquidation. Optalis has deployed senior managers yesterday and today to ensure that the service to vulnerable residents of Woodley was maintained and the Council continues to discharge its responsibilities. We even do things in Woodley. I am very pleased that Optalis has been able to step in efficiently and effectively thus demonstrating the value of its role as the Council's provider of last resort.

In connection with new business the company has recently been awarded a new five year contract for its services with Wokingham Borough Council. The company has been awarded an extra care housing scheme in Abingdon by Oxfordshire County Council and I am pleased to see that Optalis continues to widen the number of local authorities who use it as a service provider. The company continues to provide consultancy services to other local authorities who are seeking to set up their own local trading companies and this shows the high regard with which the company is held in the adult social care market place.

**94. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

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

**94.1 Rachele Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council in his absence:**

Will you guarantee that the Winnersh relief road will be delivered by 2018?

**Answer**

The Winnersh relief road is a vital piece of infrastructure which is being delivered in a number of stages. On this basis we will do everything in our power to get it delivered as soon as possible but there are multiple parties involved who have to share our urgency.

The section between Kings Street Lane and Lower Earley Way is to be delivered by the developer responsible for the Hatch Farm Dairies site. The developer has a draft programme for delivery to be complete by 2018. However this is not being delivered by the Council and so there is no way that the Council can guarantee the road will be delivered to this programme.

The widening of the section of Lower Earley Way between the new junction on to the Winnersh Relief Road and the Showcase Cinema roundabout is being delivered by the Council. The programme is currently only in outline form and not yet approved but this section could be delivered during 2017/18 financial year. The design of this section is at an early stage and so there are still many risks associated with its delivery. This being the case I would say that 2017/18 financial year is our best estimate at present but is liable to change.

The section of road between Kings Street Lane and Reading Road will also be delivered by the Council and is due to be completed in the year 2017/18. Funding for this has been allocated in the recently agreed capital programme and the work necessary to deliver the road is at an early stage. Because of this there are still many risks associated with its delivery. This being the case I would say that 2018 is our best estimate at present but again is liable to change.

Scoping for planning permission requirements is still being undertaken for both sections but a target date for this task will be the first major milestone in the delivery of the projects. Once this has been received then we will be in a much better position to set out a more definitive programme for construction delivery.

### **Supplementary Question**

Will you coordinate the northern distributor road, the Winnersh relief road and the traffic signals that will be placed on Old Forest Road so they do not wind up with a giant sized tailback, or is this your answer for the Parking Strategy, to make the Reading Road into a large car park?

### **Supplementary Answer**

Clearly coordination will happen.

### **94.2 Lindsay Ferris has asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

Will you guarantee keeping weekly waste collection until at least 2020?

### **Answer**

Thank you for your question Lindsay.

The Council's Waste and Recycling Contract with Veolia ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 and the Council has an option to extend this Contract for a further seven years until 2026. However, to ensure the Council gets best value, reaches its statutory recycling target of 50% by 2020 and maximises any opportunities to work with others, a cross party Member and Officer Task and Finish Group has been set up, which I am pleased that you are a member of. This is expected to inform future contract discussions and proposals.

### **Supplementary Question**

Wokingham's recycling rate appears to have stuck at around the same figure for a number

of years now and as a result Wokingham has fallen sharply down the league table of councils. Whilst other councils who have all the same issues as we have e.g. loss of road sweeping, house moves etc. have managed to increase their recycling rate, Wokingham has stalled at 40%. Why has this happened?

### **Supplementary Answer**

The recycling figures across the country are very interesting statistics, and in fact I saw something yesterday which indicated that across England on average recycling rates have decreased rather than increased, although there are a variety of different figures in different councils. As you will be aware we are working very closely with our colleagues in Bracknell Forest and at Reading to find ways that we can recycle more and to counter what has happened. You mentioned two items which have not helped. The other one is in fact because we are buying less and less newspapers and newsprint, which actually formed quite a sizeable part of our recycling, so there is quite perverse things happening in the market place. I can assure you that we robustly want to find those figures because if we do not reach 50% by 2020 there will be fairly hefty fines which I am sure everyone in the Borough will want to avoid.

### **94.3 Beth Rowland had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question but due to her inability to attend the meeting the following written answer was provided:**

What are you doing to help schools recruit good quality teachers and senior leaders?

### **Answer**

During the Spring 2015 WBC officers and headteachers identified the need for a Task Group on teacher recruitment and retention. Following initial investigations of commercial partners a decision was taken to work on an in-house joint schools and WBC basis, co-ordinated by a Children's Services officer.

During October 2015, desk research was carried out to explore the demographics of Wokingham's teachers, including recruitment, retention and future supply issues. A survey of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) looked at the experience of their first year of teaching, where they had studied, which websites they used to find teaching jobs and what attracted them to Wokingham and the school they were employed by. Interestingly, many had been at school in Wokingham.

The research also involved looking at other local authorities' recruitment and retention schemes, as well as their online presence and branding. Job listings were assessed and compared with other local authorities. An anonymous online exit survey has been developed, which schools are being encouraged to use. If used widely by schools, this will provide valuable information on teachers' reasons for leaving.

This research was presented to the Recruitment and Retention Task Group in November to inform future strategy on recruitment and retention. To capitalise on the social networking preferences and "word of mouth" way in which most applicants had preferred to seek their posts, the strategy was tailored to this approach.

As a result of this tangible activity has included:-

- the development of a much more substantial online presence by the Borough through Twitter, Facebook and a dedicated section of the Council website;
- the use of social media to promote the "Teaching in Wokingham" brand and provide a

window onto the vibrant schools community in the Borough, celebrating our schools' great work;

- a series of Open House Events across all school types and phases to promote the work of Wokingham schools and stimulate interest for potential recruits and returner teachers;
  - promotion events at teacher training establishments, strengthening links with those providers to work to our schools becoming an employer of choice;
  - headteachers providing guidance to Reading University students on applying for your first post and links to our online vacancies through a dedicated seminar in the Post Graduate Certificate in Education course;
  - signposting vacancies via social media;
  - encouraging schools to offer student placement opportunities therefore building early relationships with potential future employees;
  - and finally;
- 
- raising awareness among our school 6th formers about the advantages of returning to the Borough when qualified as teachers, with a "Teaching in Wokingham" stand becoming part of the annual schools careers fair.

**94.4 Prue Bray asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council in his absence:**

Will the Council look at ways of providing housing specifically for key workers priced at levels they can afford?

**Answer**

Yes - we are already looking into this on a number of sites. Traditionally, the term "key worker" has referred to public sector workers, such as teachers and nurses, but we also need to ensure there is adequate provision for other low paid workers who are crucial to sustaining our local economy. The redevelopment at Phoenix Avenue, which was mentioned earlier, will include 34 homes at intermediate rents for low-income working households. We are also in discussions around 18 "essential worker" rented apartments in Montague Park.

**Supplementary Question**

I am pleased that you are taking a comprehensive and holistic view of what a key worker is. Even with two incomes people in those categories will struggle to be able to afford to buy a house, even one of David Cameron's starter homes could cost as much as £312,000. I understand that this Council intends to change a WHL scheme of six houses at Grovelands Park, which is just about ready to go out tender, from affordable homes which it got planning permission for, into houses for sale. In other words you are not getting the houses for rent with secure tenancies which people can afford and instead houses to buy which they cannot afford. What is the justification for changing what had been agreed?

**Supplementary Answer**

As your two page Motion which we are going to discuss later highlights, the Housing Bill that is coming forward is making radical changes. Therefore it is prudent for us to just put a halt on the particular development that you are talking about, with a view to seeing if the outcome of the Bill requires it to be looked at in a different way. That does not preclude it continuing in the original way but we are just being prudent, we are taking some time out. The housing company has got quite a lot on its books at the moment with Phoenix and

Fosters so I think waiting a few months is not going to actually have any problem.

**94.5 Abdul Loyes asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was answered by the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing in his absence:**

Does the Council welcome the government's initiative to reduce social rents over the next four years?

**Answer**

I am sure the reduction in social rents of 1% per annum will bring some financial relief to the Borough's hardest hit residents, which has to be welcomed but it does mean however there will be less money available to maintain and repair our Council stock and Council housing going forward.

**94.6 Pauline Jorgensen asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council in his absence:**

Tailbacks on the A329m, caused by the new road layout, have been causing considerable delays to commuters' journeys. Could the Member set out what the Council is doing to help ease congestion on this road?

**Answer**

The scheme for Junction 10 of the M4 was designed by Highways England to reduce the number of occurrences of traffic queuing on the M4 – something that had been identified as a significant safety problem by Highways England and the Police.

The design for the scheme was modelled by Highways England and that design was checked by the Council's consultants, WSP. Both the design and the design check demonstrated the changes to the junction could be accommodated without leading to increases in delays to travellers and would be safe for all road users

Clearly the model was wrong. The scheme has resulted in greater delays for drivers heading south towards Bracknell in the morning peak. At a meeting with Highways England in January it was agreed that they would carry out video surveys of the junction to try to determine what the problem with the junction is. Once we have this data we will be able to determine what can be done to alleviate the problem. Without a good evidence base it is difficult to work out what to change that will have an immediate positive impact. It is highly frustrating that those cameras have yet to be installed some two months later and we are continuing to apply pressure to Highways England to progress this as quickly as possible.

As with many areas of the Borough and the South East this is a peak time problem only (and predominantly only am peak). Off peak the junction works really well.

Both ourselves and the Police are monitoring the safety of the junction following concerns raised by users. The Police were involved in the safety audit carried out in December and we continue to keep them updated on our plans.

So can I add something in my personal capacity of Leader on this answer. The congestion issue is not just restricted to delays on this specific road. As residents are anticipating these delays, they are finding alternative routes and therefore adding congestion onto other roads which are already extremely busy. I have asked officers to look at this impact

as well.

### **Supplementary Question**

The changes made to the A329M by the Highways Agency have helped sort out the queues on the M4. Quite true, but they have done nothing to help local residents commute along the A329M to Wokingham and Bracknell or on to the M4. Over a thousand affected residents have joined a Facebook group dedicated to fixing the A329M. Over fourteen hundred people signed an online petition asking the Highways Agency to fix the problem they have caused. There have been numerous reports of near misses and accidents due to the new road layout and a quick survey of users recently held indicated that many, as you say, are avoiding the route altogether and using roads through the countryside and residential areas, rather defeating the object of having the A329M in the first place. Users commuting report having to leave significantly earlier in order to get to work on time and in the case of Bracknell commuters, the additional journey time is 20 to 30 minutes. This design needs a rethink and recognition from the Highways Agency that moving a problem from the M4 to A329M is not acceptable. Will he work with John Redwood, our MP, who has been very active in holding the Highways Agency to account and help to highlight to the Highways Agency the continued delays in this measurement is completely unacceptable? Please can he make sure that the measurement when it eventually happens is not in the holiday periods.

### **Supplementary Answer**

Absolutely Pauline, I can give you my own personal assurance because I have been taking a personal interest in this. You will see my activity on social media. We absolutely have to get this fixed and I too praise John Redwood, the MP, who has been extremely active and extremely helpful, but there is still a lot of lobbying to do.

### **94.7 Laura Blumenthal asked the Executive Member for Planning and Highways the following question which was answered by the Leader of the Council in his absence:**

Could the Member explain what the Council is doing to ensure the best possible communication between the Highways Department and Councillors?

### **Answer**

Highways and Transport is a very busy service and receives many hundreds of public and Member enquiries each year. I feel it is very important that these queries are dealt with quickly and professionally.

One issue that arises quite often is that queries are sent to an officer who is not responsible for the issue and this can delay a response being sent out.

In late 2015 a new system was introduced for Members to contact highways through a common email address [highwaysformembers@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:highwaysformembers@wokingham.gov.uk). This email box is monitored daily and responses are copied to it so as the speed of the response can be tracked. Overall this has been a success with queries to this inbox being answered quickly and by the right people.

However there is still a great deal of Member correspondence that is not utilising this system and so we have ended up running two systems in parallel. It would help Members and the Highways Team if all correspondence to the team could utilise this email box.

Members should be aware of who their local highway inspector is for local maintenance

issues as this is often the fastest way to deal with road defects. If you do not know then send an email to 'highwaysformembers' asking for that information.

In addition to general enquiries the Highways Team works closely with the Council's Communications Team to make sure that all major projects are well publicised. Each month the Highways Team hosts a projects update for its own and utility works that is open to all and the notes of this meeting are distributed to all Members.

The Council's customer programme, which was mentioned by Pauline earlier, is focusing on how to improve the experience for all those who come into contact with the authority. As a part of this we will be improving the quality and quantity of information available online so residents and Members can find information that answers their queries quickly and easily.

**94.8 Guy Grandison asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Could the Member update the Council on the plans to provide extra space for schools in Earley?

**Answer**

The Primary School Planning Strategy for 2016-2018 which was endorsed by the Council's Executive on 29 January 2016, establishes the need for new primary school places over the period 2016 to 2018. The areas that were identified where capacity is required for 2016 are in Earley, Woodley and Shinfield.

The recommendations resulted from detailed analysis of data from various sources. In the Earley area in particular the data demonstrated that there is a requirement for 1.5 Forms of entry (FE) for at least three years with at least 1FE permanent provision.

This Conservative led Council will be investing in creating 1 FE of permanent provision at Loddon Primary School, creating 210 additional places over all year groups from September 2016. 30 additional school places for Reception year will be provided at the school for September 2016.

Our analysis of data further shows that we need places for the Earley area also. So Loddon Primary School will bring forward the Year 1 provision and will be providing an additional 30 Year 1 places for September 2016.

Further work is being done with another school in Earley to deliver 0.5 FE that is 15 additional places for each year group from September 2017.

**Supplementary Question**

Can I pass my thanks on to Officers and the Executive Member for Children's Services for committing to deliver those 210 new places for this year and more coming next year.

Could the Member give us a further update on senior school places in Earley following the redevelopment of Bulmershe and the opening of Maiden Erlegh two in Reading?

**Supplementary Answer**

The very hard work that Emma Reynolds who is the Head at Bulmershe has done and her staff and her Governors, she has led significant improvement to that school. Its popularity has therefore significantly increased.

In 2015 the unfilled places in Year 7 were thirty four and there were five left in 2014 before Maiden Erlegh two in Reading opened.

Forty children from the Earley Town Council area have been offered places at Bulmershe this year and nineteen of those live in the nearby Bulmershe and Whitegates ward, and that is for this September.

It does not appear that by opening the Maiden Erlegh School, that it has had any significant effect on the Earley residents, so that is a positive. Very few children, just nine living in the Earley Town Council area, were allocated to that school, so again not a big impact. The original Maiden Erlegh School is still oversubscribed unsurprisingly and the distance the children, in terms of their allocation from the school to how far they live from the school has not changed really significantly in the time that we are looking at here. Most children who get into that school live approximately within 1 mile from Maiden Erlegh. In the last six years it has ranged from 0.944 miles going up to 2016 this year, 1.008 miles, so not much change.

As in previous years places are available within walking distance of Earley homes, both at Bulmershe and Oakbank schools as well.

**94.9 Kate Haines had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question but due to time constraints the written answer below was provided:**

Could the Member explain what steps the Council is taking to encourage more families to foster children in Wokingham Borough?

**Answer**

The Council has entered into an agreement with 'Homes for Good Wokingham' to recruit foster carers through the local church network. This project was launched at one of our local churches on Sunday 1 November 2015.

Monthly information events take place locally during lunchtimes and also evenings. Drop-ins have also taken place on a fortnightly basis at the Brambles Area Office, which is advertised on Wokingham Borough Council's fostering website, these drop-ins started in January 2016. Promotional events have taken place at local supermarkets in January and February. Information events are advertised in local newspapers and other adverts have been placed in local periodical magazines.

The recruitment strategy has led to eight applications, one of which is for supported lodgings. One household after starting the assessment decided to pursue adoption. One household has been approved and two households are due to be presented to the March Fostering Panel. Following preparation training two further households have advised that they will be submitting applications.

In order to raise the profile of fostering within Wokingham the 'Ask Me About Fostering' Campaign was launched with badges and umbrellas. Recruitment staff and team managers joined team meetings across the Council to share information and invite staff to wear badges and carry leaflets in the event that they were asked about fostering. This was supported by the Director of Children's Services and myself as the Lead Member. I have sent all Members badges and a couple of you have also asked for umbrellas.

Foster carers have taken part in the first consultation meeting to revamp the recruitment campaign, thereby utilising their experience and motivation for becoming foster carers.

Flyers have been placed in libraries, town halls and Children's Centres and I thank Members too for your support in putting up flyers. There is an advert in Wokingham train station and also local shops. These adverts are reviewed and checked regularly by recruitment staff. Foster carers take part in recruitment information events and also distribute flyers. Foster carers are also encouraged to recommend fostering to their family and friends and there is a reward for recommending successful applicants. This month there is a flyer going out with all the council tax bills, therefore to every Wokingham household.

Support to foster carers has developed building confidence in the support on offer to them. 'Skills to Foster' training takes place approximately six times per year, which enables potential carers to access preparation training without much delay.

**94.10 Alison Swaddle had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question but due to time constraints the written answer below was provided:**

The annual Ofsted report has stated that 98 percent of the Borough's secondary school pupils are judged 'good' or 'outstanding', and that this ranks Wokingham Borough 11<sup>th</sup> out of 150 local education authorities. Does the Member welcome this outcome?

**Answer**

Yes.

Annex 4 of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2014/15 Annual Report shows that 98% of secondary age pupils in Wokingham are being educated in schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding – a slight decrease from 99% in 2014.

Ofsted publishes a separate statistical report on Wokingham secondary schools' combined performance data. The draft report for 2015, published on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015, ranks the Borough's secondary schools at the 11<sup>th</sup> centile against other mainstream secondary schools. Nationally, this is based on the progress pupils made in their best eight GCSE (or equivalent) subject entries, including English and Mathematics. By comparison, in 2014, the final Ofsted report, published on 1 April 2015, ranked the local authority schools at the 19<sup>th</sup> centile and in 2013, Wokingham was ranked at the 53<sup>rd</sup> centile – just below the national median.

In terms of attainment, our secondary schools have continued to perform well and improve. On the key performance measure, the percentage of pupils who attain five good GCSEs (at grade C or above) including English Language and Mathematics, Wokingham pupils scored 67%, significantly above the national average of 56% - a difference of 11%. In 2014, the Wokingham percentage was 66%, compared to the national average of 55% - the same difference of 11%.

The way secondary examination results will be recorded from 2016 onwards will place a greater emphasis on the progress pupils make from the end of their primary schooling measured by 'value added'.

In 2015, Wokingham pupils value added in GCSE English Language was ranked at the

16<sup>th</sup> centile nationally compared to the 27<sup>th</sup> centile in 2014 and the 52<sup>nd</sup> centile in 2013.

In Mathematics, Wokingham pupils' value added was even better; at the 4<sup>th</sup> centile in 2015, compared to the 25<sup>th</sup> centile in 2014 and the 28<sup>th</sup> in 2013.

In Science, it was at the 14<sup>th</sup> centile in 2015, the 18<sup>th</sup> centile in 2014 and the 27<sup>th</sup> in 2013.

**94.11 UllaKarin Clark had asked the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities the following question but due to time constraints the written answer below was provided:**

Can the Member explain what feedback was received from the public events and workshops on the Market Place and Peach Place developments?

**Answer**

I am pleased to say the Regeneration team has been working closely with our Highways colleagues who are delivering the improvements proposed for Market Place. Collectively with the regeneration projects, the Market Place improvements are an important part of the plans being brought forward to improve Wokingham town centre for local residents, businesses and visitors.

We have been working hand and hand with Wokingham Town Council on this joint project to bring forward a set of plans which will see the area around the town hall improved with better space for pedestrians and greater flexibility for markets and community events.

Given the proximity of the Market Place to the Peach Place regeneration scheme we felt it was important that these key areas were considered together and, with this in mind, held a joint workshop in November 2015 to discuss the approach to the detailed designs, use of the spaces and landscaping.

The workshop was well attended by local residents and representatives from groups such as the Wokingham Society, Town Team and those responsible for organising events in the spaces including the May Fayre and Winter Carnival. In addition to the joint workshop two dedicated sessions were held for those with access needs to input about the Market Place. Feedback proved invaluable in ensuring that the improved space will be fully inclusive.

We received some really good suggestions from these sessions for both Market Place and Peach Place and all the feedback comments are available to view on the Council's website.

The designs for Market Place have been refined in response to feedback including the use of natural stone paving with, the type and location of seating to be provided, the retention of the signalised crossing point and the inclusion of locations for courtesy crossings, and the locations of power, servicing and improved drainage across the site.

Peach Place designs are being updated to ensure they complement the materials used in the Market Place, with certain elements of detailing being taken through to link the spaces.

Since then we have also run a further workshop in January which looked at Peach Place in more detail, with discussions around elements such as brickwork, decoration, windows and shop front designs. We will be adding the feedback from this second session to the regeneration website shortly.

Feedback from this workshop has been used to help develop detailed designs for facades within Peach Place, including helping refine a palette of complimentary materials, increased detailing to the facades including decorative brickwork and stone corning, deep window reveals.

The resulting designs will be used to bring both of these exciting projects forward next year, with work expected to start at Peach Place in January 2017 and at Market Place shortly after.

It is an exciting time for the town which will start to see real progress in the coming year with some fantastic improvements to make coming to Wokingham even better.

**94.12 Dianne King had asked the Executive Member for Resident Services the following question but due to time constraints the written answer below was provided:**

Can the Member explain how the Council's proposed Library strategy will benefit the residents of Wokingham Borough?

**Answer**

In recent years the Wokingham Borough Council Library Service has proven to be a popular and valued service for our residents. Its usage has increased, its membership remains strong, and the range of activities it delivers has grown and adapted to keep pace with people's expectations.

The Library Offer, which is currently out to consultation, aims to show how the Council can continue to deliver a Library Service that meets the expectations of our residents as the borough evolves and the new communities become a reality within our Strategic Development Locations.

The cornerstone of this Library Offer is to make the most of the assets we have within the Library Service, to have our libraries open for as long as possible and to enable individuals and groups to use them when they need them. We propose to do this by introducing some self-service and unstaffed opening within some libraries, and by looking on a case-by-case basis at the locations of our libraries to identify any opportunities for getting more out of our service.

As is mentioned above, the Library Offer is currently out to consultation and it is important for us to understand what residents think about our proposals and how they will impact upon their usage of the Library Service. We believe that a lot of our successes in the past have been due to us listening to what residents have told us, and this is a practice that we intend to repeat so that we continue to deliver the Library Service that people want.

**94.13 Ian Pittock had asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question but due to time constraints the written answer below was provided:**

Will the authority have sufficient places for new secondary pupils this September and what part will Bohunt play in this?

**Answer**

I am really proud to stand here tonight and say that this Conservative led Council will have enough secondary school places for September 2016, and not only that but 99% of students this year received an offer for one of their top three choices of schools.

Based on Bohunt School admitting up to 180 children (the planned capacity for 2016) there are 245 unallocated places (or 11.8% of the total number of places) across the Borough. However, without Bohunt there would only have been 65 unallocated places (or 3.6% of the total), again across the whole of the Borough. This is considered to be too few places to be sure there would be sufficient places to meet demand, taking account of late applications, and families moving into the area (into both new homes and established residential areas).

Looking at the south area alone (served by Bohunt, Emmbrook, Forest, Holt, Oakbank and St Crispins schools) there were 186 unallocated places. This is only six places above the capacity provided by Bohunt School. This would have been insufficient to meet the needs of the community, taking account of the impact of the new homes currently under construction in the four Strategic Development Locations as well as late applications and movement into established residential areas.

## **95. MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND WARD MATTERS**

### **95.1 UllaKarin Clark asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

After the last few months many Emmbrook residents have raised significant concerns about the phasing of the Winnersh crossroads traffic lights. Could I please have an agreement for a comprehensive review of the phasing of these lights and ensure that they operate at maximum efficiency for car flow, whilst also allowing for safe pedestrian and disabled crossings?

#### **Answer:**

In a word yes, we will arrange a meeting for the relevant people just to understand what has been done to date because I know they have reviewed it many, many times, but I do not believe necessarily the content of that review has been adequately explained. Absolutely we will do something and I will personally be involved in that.

### **95.2 Tom McCann asked the Executive Member for Regeneration and Communities the following question:**

At the budget meeting you said that the profit from Wokingham town centre's regeneration, and I am quoting, 'every pound that comes in in profit will be ploughed back into essential services as required.' Never mind mixing up capital and revenue, what has happened to your promise that the profits from the regeneration will be spent around the Borough, and in particular in Woodley, or have you exposed the lie that no one will benefit except Wokingham town centre?

#### **Answer:**

All I can say is it is one and the same. All profits coming into the Borough will be for the Borough.

### **95.3 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing the following question:**

A number of residents in my ward live in social housing and they pay social rents and they are some of the most vulnerable in our Borough. They will therefore have been worried to read the claim in this Liberal Democrat 'Focus' Winter 2016 issue, that social housing rents for all will double by the Housing Bill. Can the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing confirm that this is completely untrue for those paying a social rent?

**Answer:**

Yes I can. The Government's view is that housing in the social sector offered at subsidised rent should go to those in most genuine need. On that basis the Government had decided that housing tenants with a household income in excess of £30,000 or above will be required to pay at least the level of rent for their accommodation if their rent is currently being subsidised to the market level. I would stress that it is only those whose income is above £30,000 who could possibly be impacted by this change. We are at present trying to determine how many of our residents have incomes above £30,000 who are currently in social housing. We believe this to be somewhere in the region of 10 to 15%, so that is 80 to 85% we believe will not be impacted by that so that statement given out in the leaflet is very misleading.

**95.4 Prue Bray asked the Deputy Member for Environment the following question:**

This is a question about Winnersh. Philip, at the February Council meeting you made a rather extraordinary speech in which you took great delight in saying I was wrong about the funding for the Winnersh relief road. Unfortunately for you I was right and you were the one who got it wrong. I have asked officers directly about the history of the funding and I have a copy here for you of the confirmation that you got it wrong and I got it right. Given that this is incontrovertible evidence that you are wrong, will you now retract your claim about the funding of the relief road and apologise not only to me and Rachelle but also to the public for misleading them and to the Officer involved for misrepresenting him?

**Answer:**

I clearly have to study this and I will give a written response to Councillor Bray.

The following written response was provided after the meeting:

I made my light hearted comments in the light of the Project Manager's written confirmation of 17th November that funding was available as and when required and the issue of the Programme of works which shows completion by 2nd February 2018 of which you were aware. This was to contradict your constantly gloomy predictions made in Liberal Democrat leaflets and to the December Winnersh Parish Council that the road would be late because there was no funding available before 2020.

I see no reason to issue any apologies.

**95.5 Guy Grandison asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

Since the construction began at the Winnersh relief road for the Hatch Farm Dairy site, there have been numerous heavy goods vehicles going to and from Lower Earley Way, and in spite of a wheel washing facility being part of the planning conditions there has been a substantial amount of material, including small stones, being left on the road and the bike path, from vehicles accessing the site. What is the Council doing to reduce this?

**Answer:**

We have all experienced this happening on major development. The Council have a good track record of once it is reported, going back to the relevant development and making sure that they are actually fulfilling what they are obliged to do as part of the planning application. What I will do now is I will pass that on to the relevant Planning officers to look into and I will make sure that they feed back to you the results.

**95.6 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

Whilst I do not want to go into the specifics, I spoke to a resident recently in Twyford, who had a child at a school; they went abroad for a year and when they came back, could not get back into their original school. With the push for moving to academies, how will issues like this be managed in the future?

**Answer:**

Speaking recently to the Secretary of State, there are discussions around admissions and how that might change. Nothing has been decided formally about that, but it is not to say with all the big changes that admissions are up for debate as well. Currently we do all of our admissions for all of our schools and will continue to do so up until there is a legislative change or if any of our schools want to move out of our admissions arrangements. I do not see that happening for a little while yet, so hopefully they will continue to be part of the one scheme. It is coordinated, it works very well and I do not see any reason for change at the moment.

**95.7 Chris Smith asked the Executive Member for Children's Services the following question:**

A number of children from Earley and Winnersh will be attending the new Bohunt School from September. What provision is being made to ensure safe and reliable transport to the new school?

**Answer:**

For children coming from the Earley area I would expect that there would be at least one school within walking distance from their home with an available place. Where Bohunt is the closest school and it is not within the three walking miles distance by safe walking route then free transport will be available where necessary and in accordance with our Home to School Transport Policy. Where it is possible the free support will be offered through a bus pass and using public transport. I know that you have raised a number of issues as your residents have been concerned about that and they will hopefully be told very shortly how their children will be transported to school.

**95.8 Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

There has been traffic chaos outside Shute End this week whilst work is being done on the footway. Why is yet another pile of money being spent on something in the Wokingham town centre when in Winnersh we had assurances from Mr Kaiser that we were going to get the shoddy work done on the footways on the Reading Road fixed and a zebra crossing on Robin Hood Lane, where a young girl was injured? How long are we going to have to wait?

**Answer:**

Clearly Rachelle you are not aware of the background here. The background here is that this particular pavement area has become extremely slippery and we have had some serious incidents of residents slipping over. Therefore from a health and safety perspective this work has had to be prioritised. It is going on at the moment, because heaven forbid this Council actually knew that that danger was there and someone slipped over say your granny, and broke her hip, when we knew that there was some danger there we would be in serious trouble. I am sure you would not expect us to move money to do the sorts of things you are talking about rather than this. Clearly the issues that you are looking for will be addressed in due time but unfortunately when it comes to a serious

health and safety issue here I am not going to apologise for this Council taking that route. We are serious on addressing those sorts of issues.

**95.9 Malcolm Richards asked the Leader of the Council the following question:**

A number of my residents are concerned about the construction traffic on Keep Hatch Road in Norreys ward. What is the current status of the assessment on the suitability of Keep Hatch Road for construction traffic during the development of the SDLs?

**Answer:**

There are two issues associated with this issue. The first one is the Construction Management Plan associated with the developments in the location. There have been discussions and I believe they are almost completed, to modify the existing plan to put in place a form of a one way system for the construction traffic. Therefore you minimise the opportunity of construction traffic actually meeting another piece of construction traffic going the other way.

The second part, because that is the easy bit, is actually is this road appropriate for Heavy Goods Vehicles anyway? The recent accident where two HGVs did hit each other was actually nothing to do with the development. However, they highlighted the potential safety issue of that road. What I have sponsored, we will with the Highways Group and John and the Police, is that there will be a meeting to discuss that specific issue; safety of that road for HGV's. Clearly local Members will be involved in that.

**95.10 Philip Mirfin asked the Executive Member for Environment the following question:**

Whilst attending our regular Emmbrook street surgery on Saturday last week at Woosehill Lane, we had drawn to our attention the overgrown area of the flood plain at the rear of these houses that appeared to have many self-seeded trees within that flood plain.

Apparently in previous years the Council contractors had cut all of this vegetation back and the trees as well but do not appear to have done so for some time. The residents were concerned in the case of a flood that the land would continue to work as a flood plain. Is there any plan to cut to this uncut vegetation and the self-seeded trees and can we offer any assurance on this that we will now instruct our contractors to cut all these areas back?

**Answer:**

Very interesting case this. The Council has no records of our contractors being involved in the cutting of vegetation to the rear of houses along Woosehill Lane. Officers are aware that the local residents group 'Friends of the Emm Brook' have, in the past, cut down overgrown trees along this stretch of the river. In addition, maintenance of this section of the Emm Brook is included on the Environment Agency's annual maintenance programme and some weeding and removal of vegetation has taken place in previous years. This year, the Environment Agency will be conducting work along the section of the Emm Brook between Barkham Road and the A329 in July.

Officers will look into the need for clearing vegetation in this area further. However, it is important to note that woods, trees and hedgerows can play a key role in water management whether reducing flood risk, improving water quality or helping freshwater wildlife to thrive. It is becoming increasingly evident in academic literature and following recent flooding events across the country that vegetation alongside rivers and streams and on flood plain acts as a drag on flood waters slowing down floods and increasing water storage. For this reason, it may not be the appropriate option to cut back all of the

vegetation.

## **96. MOTIONS**

### **96.1 Motion 378 submitted by Prue Bray**

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Prue Bray and seconded by Lindsay Ferris.

'This Council acknowledges that whilst many people may aspire to own their own home, in many cases their income will never reach a level that will allow them to buy a property even at a subsidised cost under Right to Buy, shared equity, or 80% market value starter homes as announced in the Housing and Planning Bill. Through its Housing Strategy the Council has committed itself to providing 1000 additional affordable homes in the Borough by the end of 2018 and as part of that strategy recognises the need to provide more accommodation that people can afford to rent, to contribute to satisfying the demand for housing locally.

The Council notes that

- market rents within the Borough are approximately 3 times social rents, the rent level normally paid by Council tenants, with the market rent for typical 3-bedroom properties set at £1200 per month or more, putting them beyond the reach of local families on low incomes, including those on Housing Benefit
- according to information collected to inform the Housing Strategy, only 12% of those on the housing register in Wokingham Borough have sufficient income to be able to afford even affordable rent, which is defined as 80% of market rent
- the shortage of Council and housing association properties often means the only type of accommodation available to those seeking help from the Council's Housing service is in the private rented sector
- the pressure on the private rented sector locally and the competition for accommodation has led to increases in the number of people accepted as homeless in Wokingham Borough due to the end of shorthold tenancies.

The Council therefore regrets measures in the Conservative government's Housing and Planning Bill which reduce the ability to provide homes at rents that local people can afford, including:

- Pay to Stay, under which households living in social housing in the Borough with incomes greater than £30,000 per annum will be required to pay additional rent, up to near market levels, with the additional income going to the Treasury, not the landlord;
- The forced sale of high value Council housing as it becomes vacant, with the proceeds to be paid to the Treasury to fund the extension of Right to Buy to housing association tenants across the country;
- The ability for the government to assess the income that it deems it should receive under the sale of high value council housing, and to require councils to pay the amount so calculated whether or not the houses have been sold and regardless of the money received;
- The introduction of the choice to build "starter homes" for sale on new developments to replace the requirement to build affordable homes for rent or shared ownership, or to provide equivalent funding for off-site affordable homes

and will

- Work with other local authorities to oppose the introduction of the unfair levy on councils based on an assessment of the sale value of Council homes, which will lead to either a reduction in Wokingham Borough Council housing through sales or a reduction in the money available to maintain that housing;
- Continue to lobby the Conservative government to oppose Pay to Stay and in particular to oppose the use of a blanket figure of £30,000 for household income outside London above which Pay to Stay will apply, pointing out the unfairness of not taking into account differing market rent levels and other living costs in different parts of the country;
- Provide information on the measures in the Housing and Planning Bill and their implications for existing tenants and those seeking housing advice, and provide support and advice for individual tenants on issues arising from these measures
- Continue to seek to provide additional housing for social and affordable rent through its Housing department and its housing company, WHL;
- Endeavour to maximise the number of properties provided for social and affordable rent by developers under their affordable housing planning obligations, whilst recognising the new duty that is to be placed on councils to promote starter homes for purchase under the terms of the Housing and Planning Bill.'

Keith Baker indicated that he had asked the Constitution Review Working Group to look at putting in a limit to the number of words contained within a Motion.

Following debate, upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

### **96.2 Motion 379 submitted by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey**

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey and seconded by Prue Bray.

'In the light of the Council's worsened financial position following this year's reduced local government funding settlement and future funding forecasts to 2020, this Council will review its plans for the regeneration of Wokingham town centre.'

It was proposed by Keith Baker and seconded by Philip Mirfin that the Motion be amended as follows:

***'This Council recognises the hard work by the Officers and Councillors*** in the light of the Council's reduced local government funding settlement and future funding forecasts to 2020, ***and*** this Council will ***ensure that*** the regeneration of Wokingham town centre ***will be delivered for the benefit of all residents throughout the Borough.***

### **96.3 Adjournment of the meeting**

At this point, 9.57pm, the meeting adjourned for a short period as requested by Tom McCann to allow consideration of the proposed amendment to the Motion.

### **96.4 Recommencement of the meeting**

At 10.03pm the meeting recommenced.

### **96.5 Motion 379 continued**

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

#### **96.6 Continuation of the meeting**

At this point in the meeting 10.05pm, in accordance with Procedure Rule 4.2.12 (m), Council considered a Motion to continue the meeting beyond 10.30pm for a maximum of 30 minutes to enable further business on the Agenda to be transacted. This was proposed by Prue Bray and seconded by Lindsay Ferris.

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

#### **96.7 Motion 379 continued**

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

**RESOLVED:** That this Council recognises the hard work by the Officers and Councillors in the light of the Council's reduced local government funding settlement and future funding forecasts to 2020, and this Council will ensure that the regeneration of Wokingham town centre will be delivered for the benefit of all residents throughout the Borough.

#### **96.8 Motion 380 submitted by Lindsay Ferris**

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Lindsay Ferris and seconded by Tom McCann.

'This Council believes that Wokingham and Emmbrook football club should be granted a lease to enable them to play Hellenic League Premier Division football at Cantley Park.'

Following debate, upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared by the Mayor to be lost.

#### **96.9 Motion 381 submitted by Malcolm Richards**

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Malcolm Richards and seconded by Julian McGhee-Sumner.

'This Council will continue to consult on and investigate all aspects of safety and traffic flow at the roads involved in the recently upgraded system at Coppid Beach Roundabout. This Council will also continue to ensure that the most effective and appropriate measures are in place to protect motorists and pedestrians on all road networks within Wokingham Borough.'

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

**RESOLVED:** That this Council will continue to consult on and investigate all aspects of safety and traffic flow at the roads involved in the recently upgraded system at Coppid Beach Roundabout. This Council will also continue to ensure that the most effective and appropriate measures are in place to protect motorists and pedestrians on all road networks within Wokingham Borough.

#### **96.10 Motion 382 submitted by David Sleight**

Due to time constraints Motion 382 was not considered and in accordance with Rule 4.2.8.1 was deemed to have fallen.

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