

# **EXECUTIVE**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON**

### **THURSDAY, 16 JANUARY 2020**

**Councillors Present:** Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Hilary Cole, Rick Jones, Ross Mackinnon, Richard Somner and Howard Woollaston

**Also Present:** John Ashworth (Corporate Director - Environment), Melanie Ellis (Chief Accountant), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Olivia Lewis (Group Executive (Lib Dem)), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Shiraz Sheikh (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Councillor Adrian Abbs, Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer), Councillor Carolyne Culver, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor Owen Jeffery, Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Erik Pattenden and Councillor Tony Vickers

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Lynne Doherty and Councillor Alan Macro

*(Councillor Graham Bridgman, Deputy Leader, in the Chair)*

## **PART I**

### **75. Minutes**

Councillor Bridgman advised that he would be declaring an interest in Agenda Item 7 (Granting the leasehold of the Stratfield Mortimer Library building to Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council) which would require him to leave the Chamber. Therefore another Member of the Executive would need to be appointed to Chair the meeting for that item.

Councillor Rick Jones proposed that Councillor Hilary Cole be appointed as Chairman for this particular item. This was seconded by Councillor Howard Woollaston.

*(Councillor Graham Bridgman abstained from the vote).*

**RESOLVED that** Councillor Hilary Cole would Chair the meeting for Agenda Item 7.

The Minutes of the three meetings held on 19 December 2019 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Deputy Leader, subject to the following amendments:

#### **Meeting 1 (Ordinary Meeting)**

It was noted that the link to the transcription of the questions and answers from the previous meeting needed to be enabled. This would be corrected.

#### **Meeting 2 (First Special Meeting)**

**Item 65 – Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (EX3832) – second page, final paragraph, fourth sentence:**

She acknowledged that the Market Street development had a lower affordable housing provision but this was an **exception**.

**Item 67 – Community Investment Scheme (EX3860) – seventh paragraph:**

Councillor Culver next queried if there were examples of **where Abundance (the private company referred to) had worked with other local authorities**.

**Item 68 – Senior management posts of Chief Executive, Executive Director (Place), Service Director and Service Lead (EX3825) – Resolutions (bullet point 3:**

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- the posts of Service Director for Adult Social Care, Environment, and Strategy & Governance be established and recruited to early in 2020;

### 76. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Carlyne Culver declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 by virtue of the fact that she was a teacher at Theale Green School, but reported that, as her interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, she determined to remain in the meeting for the matter but would not participate in the debate.

Councillor Graham Bridgman declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 by virtue of the fact that he was a Stratfield Mortimer Parish Councillor and reported that, as his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, he would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

### 77. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions submitted.

### 78. **Petitions**

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

### 79. **Schools Funding Formula 2020/21 (EX3784)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning the primary and secondary school funding formula for 2020/21. The report set out West Berkshire Council's funding proposals for 2020/21 post consultation with all schools.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed acceptance of the report's recommendations. He explained that it was an annual requirement for the Council to approve the funding formula for primary and secondary schools.

In terms of the consultation response, Councillor Mackinnon explained that largely favourable responses had been received to all of the consultation questions with the exception of question four which received a more balanced response: 'Which of the following options would you support regarding a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block for 2020/21?'

Nine of the sixteen respondents to this question supported a transfer, the remaining seven did not. Of the nine; four supported a transfer of 0.25% (the proposal in this report), three were in favour of a larger transfer of 0.5% and the remaining two did not specify a transfer amount.

Councillor Dominic Boeck seconded approval of the report's recommendations.

Councillor Erik Pattenden noted that 16 (close to 20%) of schools had responded to the consultation. He queried whether a response from this number sufficiently represented West Berkshire's schools. He also questioned how much weight could be given to responses from 16 schools and whether their feedback could have altered the recommendations.

Councillor Mackinnon responded. He agreed it would have been preferable for a higher response rate, but added that schools could not be forced to respond. The responses received did not alter the report's recommendations.

Councillor Boeck added to the response by stating that many of West Berkshire's schools looked to their representative(s) on the Schools' Forum to be their voice on such matters. The Schools' Forum was represented by each sector of West Berkshire's schools. He would not expect small schools for example to respond individually.

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Councillor Pattenden noted this, but pointed out that schools had been given very little time (ten working days) to respond. He was concerned that the consultation had been rushed. He was also concerned that the consultation responses would not be considered by the Schools' Forum until 20 January 2020 ahead of a final decision needing to be made on 21 January 2020.

Councillor Boeck explained that this aligned with the consultation process conducted annually for the school funding formula. Councillor Pattenden felt this routine practice was flawed.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to the recommendations. He reiterated that the consultation response that related to recommendations one and two had been strongly in favour of approval. He felt it unlikely that a higher response rate would have elicited a different answer. Councillor Pattenden stated that a higher response would have given greater assurance of schools' views. Councillor Mackinnon reiterated the point that all schools were represented on the Schools' Forum.

Councillor David Marsh queried why the recommended top slice of 0.25% was unpopular to the majority of the responding schools. Councillor Boeck explained that he had not yet read all of the individual school responses in detail. Ultimately this would be for the Schools' Forum to determine.

Councillor Marsh then asked what would happen in the event that the Schools' Forum did not accept the Executive's recommendations at its meeting on 20 January 2020. In response, Councillor Graham Bridgman drew Members' attention to recommendation 2.2: 'If the Schools' Forum do not agree with the proposals, the Local Authority can make the final decision on funding allocations, and can appeal to the Secretary of State to make a block transfer.'

Following on from one of Councillor Pattenden's comments, Councillor Lee Dillon felt that this annual process needed to be reviewed when considering that the final decision needed to be made one day after the Schools' Forum meeting. The only path available in this short timeframe, should the Schools' Forum reject the recommendation for a 0.25% top slice, was recommendation 2.2.

Councillor Dillon also voiced concern at Councillor Boeck's comment that he had not read all the consultation responses in detail. Councillor Boeck clarified his response to Councillor Marsh by stating that he was aware of the responses provided by schools, but he was unaware of the motivation for their views.

Councillor Pattenden commented that he had read the detailed consultation responses, in particular the responses of schools opposed to the 0.25% top slice. There was acceptance that the High Needs Block was underfunded. However, there was concern that the proposed 0.25% (which amounted to approximately £261k) was not sufficient to meet the shortfall which, he had been informed by Officers, was in the region of £1.5m.

Councillor Mackinnon felt it entirely appropriate to look to alleviate this shortfall at least in part. Councillor Pattenden felt that schools wanted the underfunding to be acknowledged. There was concern that this could impact on education resources and class sizes.

Councillor Mackinnon commented, as noted earlier, that some of the schools that responded were opposed to a transfer of any funding, whereas others supported increases equal to and in excess of 0.25%. He clarified the point that this was not new funding, it would be a transfer from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block.

Councillor Dillon agreed that additional funds would of course be welcomed. However, the Formula was not going far enough. West Berkshire's schools were being underfunded in the region of £1.5m.

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Councillor Boeck agreed with Councillor Dillon in that the funding was currently not right for West Berkshire's schools. While the Schools Block allocation would increase by £5.3m in 2020/21, this not enough. He would continue to lobby through West Berkshire's Members of Parliament to improve on the funding situation.

### **RESOLVED to:**

- 1) Replicate the DfE's National Funding Formula to calculate the funding allocations and to introduce the mobility factor into the local formula.
- 2) Address any surplus or shortfall in funding by a combination of reduced AWPU (age weighted pupil unit) rates and a cap on gains.
- 3) Apply a top slice of 0.25% to the schools' funding, in order to support High Needs, which would provide £261k additional funding for high needs.

If the Schools' Forum did not agree with the proposals, the Local Authority could make the final decision on funding allocations, and could appeal to the Secretary of State to make a block transfer.

### **Other options considered:**

A number of options were considered and consulted on for formula allocation.

## **80. Granting the Leasehold of the Stratfield Mortimer Library Building to Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (EX3865)**

*(Councillor Graham Bridgman left the meeting at 5.21pm)*

*(Councillor Hilary Cole in the Chair)*

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) which sought approval for Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council's request for West Berkshire Council to grant them a 99 year lease of the Stratfield Mortimer Library building so they could increase community use of the building alongside the Council's Library Service. If approved, the Parish Council would take on the ownership and management of the building.

Councillor Rick Jones stated that there had been many successes in the Library Service in recent years. There had been a growth in the number of volunteers, libraries had become vibrant community spaces and the Council had been successfully working in partnership with Town and Parish Councils. He made reference, as an example, to Hungerford Library. This had become a community hub and was managed by Hungerford Town Council. This same principle was being recommended for Stratfield Mortimer. It would bring significant benefits to the Parish and the District Council, both community and financial benefits.

Councillor Dominic Boeck previously held the Library Portfolio and he had been involved in the work to transform the Library Service from the outset. He was delighted to see that the Stratfield Mortimer Library was performing so well and gave his support to the report's recommendations.

Councillor David Marsh turned to the report's conclusions. He was concerned at the reference made in paragraph 7.1 in relation to the distance between Burghfield Library and Stratfield Mortimer Library, and having two libraries in relatively close proximity. Councillor Marsh felt this reference could imply that Burghfield Library was under threat. This was a concern when many of the Council's libraries had previously been at risk of closure.

Councillor Jones understood the concern, but made the point that the service was performing well. There would be a further strategic review of the Library Service early in

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2020, but this carried no threat to any individual library. The focus of the review would be on benefits to the community.

Councillor Boeck commented that it had not been the Council's intention to close all its libraries. This further review had been planned since the previous review in 2016. He praised the support given by Parish and Town Councils to West Berkshire's libraries.

Councillor Hilary Cole added that the involvement of communities and volunteers did much to contribute to this success story.

She also advised that a covenant was placed on the Stratfield Mortimer Library building which meant it could only be used for that purpose. However, the Parish Council could put the building, which was being transferred in a good condition, to community use in addition to library use.

**RESOLVED to** work with Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council (SMPC) to negotiate a 99 year lease of the building to the parish council and a Joint User Agreement so that:

- SMPC is responsible for the cost of the maintenance and upkeep of the building, delivering a saving to be reinvested in the library service to improve resilience.
- The Council maintains its statutory responsibility for delivering a library service - set out in a Joint User Agreement between the Council and SMPC.
- SMPC are able to continue using the building as their parish council office without paying rent to the Council.
- SMPC are able to develop the use of the building for community purposes – for example, as Hungerford Town Council has done since taking over the Hungerford library building.
- SMPC are able to invest in the building to increase the community facilities available – for example, a meeting room, a publicly accessible toilet facility, storage.
- The Council and SMPC continue to work together to increase the use of the library service and other community activities in the building for the benefit of residents.

**RESOLVED that** Legal, Property and Legal Services would work with SMPC to agree the Heads of Terms of the lease and Joint User Agreement by April 2020 or as soon as is possible thereafter.

**RESOLVED that** Property Services identify a value for the asset using the Depreciated Replacement cost methodology.

### **Other options considered:**

Continuing with the current arrangements; including the ongoing cost of maintaining the building and limiting community access to 19 hours per week.

## 81. **Members' Questions**

*(Councillor Graham Bridgman returned to the meeting and resumed in the Chair)*

A full transcription of the Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As](#).

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**(a) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Economic Development and Planning submitted by Councillor Tony Vickers**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Tony Vickers on the subject of what the Council was doing to secure delivery of the 2000 new dwellings at Sandleford Park was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

**(b) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Economic Development and Planning submitted by Councillor Jeff Brooks**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Jeff Brooks (asked on his behalf by Councillor Lee Dillon) on the subject of the publication of the Economic Development Plan was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

**(c) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Economic Development and Planning submitted by Councillor Alan Macro**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Alan Macro on the subject of why the publication of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HEELA) had been delayed was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

**(d) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Environment submitted by Councillor Adrian Abbs**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Adrian Abbs on the subject of the reduction of West Berkshire Council's carbon footprint, since the climate emergency was declared, was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment.

**(e) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Environment submitted by Councillor Adrian Abbs**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Adrian Abbs on the subject of the actual usage of Electric Vehicle charging points in West Berkshire during 2019 was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment.

**(f) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Economic Development and Planning submitted by Councillor Steve Masters**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of the actual numbers of both affordable and social units delivered by developers on greenfield and brownfield sites across West Berkshire since May 2015 was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

**(g) Question to be answered by the Portfolio Member for Economic Development and Planning submitted by Councillor Steve Masters**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of the Council's aspirations for maximising social and affordable units on the Market Street development was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 5.47pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....