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Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2020

Councillors Present: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Hilary Cole, Lynne Doherty, Rick Jones, Ross Mackinnon, Richard Somner and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: John Ashworth (Executive Director - Place), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Kevin Griffin (Head of Customer Services & ICT), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Shiraz Sheikh (Legal Services Manager), Councillor Adrian Abbs, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer), Councillor Carlyne Culver, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor Owen Jeffery, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Erik Pattenden and Phil Rumens (Digital Services Manager)

PART I

99. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

It was noted that the resolutions for minute item 89 – Revenue Budget 2020/21 - contained unconfirmed figures. However, this was usual practice for this report at Executive meetings, with the figures confirmed when the report was approved by Full Council. This took place at the Council meeting on the 3 March 2020.

100. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Carlyne Culver declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 by virtue of the fact that she held Bond holdings with Abundance Investment, but reported that, as her interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, she determined to remain to take part in the debate.

101. Public Questions

Councillor Lynne Doherty gave thanks to all the members of the public that had submitted questions for this Executive meeting. In accordance with the resolution passed at the Council meeting of the 29 April 2020, Councillor Doherty confirmed that all public questioners would receive written responses and these would be published on the Council's website within five clear working days of the meeting.

Councillor Doherty looked forward to seeing public questioners back in the Council Chamber in due course.

The written responses provided to the public questions can be viewed at the following link: [Transcription of Q&As](#).

(a) Question submitted by Mr Graham Storey to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning

A question standing in the name of Mr Graham Storey on the subject of the number of social housing units for rent that had been added to West Berkshire's housing stock in the last five years received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

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(b) **Question submitted by Mr Graham Storey to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Mr Graham Storey on the subject of whether the Council believed that the number of houses it had added to the local housing stock met the needs of low income residents in West Berkshire received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

(c) **Question submitted by Ms Helen Wright to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Ms Helen Wright asking what the Council's targets and plans were for adding social housing for rent received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

(d) **Question submitted by Mr John Gotelee to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance**

A question standing in the name of Mr John Gotelee asking for a copy of the redacted development contract between St Modwen and West Berkshire Council regarding the London Road Industrial Estate received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance.

(e) **Question submitted by Mr John Gotelee to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance**

A question standing in the name of Mr John Gotelee asking for a list of the members in the steering group tasked with taking regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate forward received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance.

(f) **Question submitted by Mr Paul Morgan to the Portfolio Holder for Finance**

A question standing in the name of Mr Paul Morgan requesting detail on allocations of S106 funding and the amount unallocated received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

(g) **Question submitted by Mr John Stewart to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Mr John Stewart on the subject of the status of the football ground in Faraday Road received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

(h) **Question submitted by Mr Alan Pearce to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Mr Alan Pearce requesting a document (redacted if necessary) listing the suitable and alternative sites available in respect of Newspaper House received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

(i) **Question submitted by Mr Alan Pearce to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Mr Alan Pearce on the subject of whether the Newspaper House planning application met the requirements of the Council's sustainable drainage planning policy received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

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(j) **Question submitted by Mr Alan Pearce to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning**

A question standing in the name of Mr Alan Pearce asking whether a Council drainage officer was in attendance when the Newspaper House planning application was discussed received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Planning.

(k) **Question submitted by Mrs Jane Gulliver to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside**

A question standing in the name of Mrs Jane Gulliver on the subject of whether the Northbrook stream was classed as a critical watercourse received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside.

(l) **Question submitted by Mrs Jane Gulliver to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside**

A question standing in the name of Mrs Jane Gulliver on the subject of the maintenance of the banks and bed of the Northbrook stream received a written answer from the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside.

102. **Petitions**

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

103. **Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge - West Berkshire (EX3887)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning the results of the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge for West Berkshire Council and the action plan produced to address the recommendations within it.

Councillor Lynne Doherty explained that the LGA Peer Challenge of the Council was undertaken in November 2019 and was scheduled after the Council invited the LGA to conduct the Peer Challenge.

In summary, the report highlighted that the Council had much to shout about in terms of its successes and in its provision of services to residents, but there was always room for improvement. These areas for attention were detailed within the action plan. However, predominantly the report painted a positive picture which highlighted strong governance, strong leadership and sound financial controls.

Councillor Jeff Brooks agreed there were many positives in this report. However, some areas for attention had been highlighted previously, i.e. the Council needing to do more to promote its good work. He sought an assurance that this area would be taken forward.

Councillor Brooks also reflected on comments made about the Council being risk averse. In some ways this was a positive, but he queried whether the Council could be more ambitious in some areas.

In response to these questions, Councillor Doherty acknowledged that the Council could improve upon the promotion of its good work. This would be taken forward by the Customer First Programme Board. Councillor Doherty felt that the Council was ambitious, as evidenced in the Council Strategy, but it needed to be realistic.

Councillor Lee Dillon gave thanks to Councillor Brooks for his involvement in the Peer Challenge on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group.

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Councillor Dillon then referred to the action plan and noted that the timescale for some of the actions was in the relatively near future. He queried whether this was realistic alongside the Covid-19 response and recovery work.

Councillor Doherty agreed that the Council was very busy in its response and recovery work. However, much good work had come out of the Council's activity in relation to Covid-19 that would help to meet some of these actions, for example it had helped to move community engagement work forward. There would however still be a need to review timescales in some areas.

Councillor Adrian Abbs also queried timescales, specifically the December 2020 timescale for recommendation three: 'to determine West Berkshire's housing, economic growth and environment priorities, how they need to inter-relate and reflect them in the emerging respective strategies'. Was this a realistic target when the Council was also responding to Covid-19?

As explained to Councillor Dillon, Councillor Doherty advised that there was a need, as part of the Covid-19 recovery process, to look at the impact of the crisis on the 2036 Vision. A key piece of work to be undertaken as a priority was to review the timescales for some areas including the priorities listed in recommendation three.

Councillor Erik Pattenden referred to paragraph 4.2 of the Executive Summary and the first bullet point in relation to engaging with residents. He offered his assistance in this work. The Liberal Democrats had made a proposal at the Council meeting in March 2020 to set up community forums and this could be a way of taking this forward.

Councillor Doherty thanked Councillor Pattenden for his offer and advised him that he could be involved. The starting point on which to try and improve this was to liaise with residents to understand how they wished to be involved. A survey would be conducted to this end.

Councillor Hilary Cole agreed this was a positive review. She felt that it demonstrated that the Council had built on the peer review of four years ago. The very sound action plan would help to address those areas identified as needing attention.

RESOLVED that:

- The report be noted.
- The actions that were being taken to address the recommendations within the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report be approved.

Other options considered: The Council found valuable the Corporate Peer Challenge process which reflects on the strengths recognised by fellow experienced Councillors and officers and also recommendations for further improvement. A careful consideration of the feedback, resulting in an action plan to address the recommendation, is the option that will achieve the maximum benefit from undertaking the corporate peer challenge.

104. Launch of a Community Bond (EX3896)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) which sought approval for the Council to launch a Community Bond of £1m. This bond would be for retail investors, with marketing and promotion to West Berkshire residents, to enable the Council to fund some of its activities that delivered the Environment Strategy at a cheaper financing rate than using the Public Works Loans Board (PWLb), which was the Council's traditional source of borrowing.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon presented the report and proposed approval of its recommendations. This was seconded by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter who stated that he looked forward to the Bond helping the Council to grow the Environment Strategy

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quite significantly. As stated by Councillor Mackinnon, the Council could access additional funds with lower borrowing costs. It also gave the Council the opportunity to engage further with residents and gave residents the opportunity to contribute personally towards their own pensions/savings vehicles, but also to the Environment Strategy.

Councillor Carlyne Culver gave her full support to this approach which she felt was an excellent idea. She noted that information on the Community Bond was already on the website of Abundance Investment.

Councillor Culver did however feel that greater clarity was needed on what the bond would be used for. The report referred to the Solar PV pilot, but also referred to other Capital Programme schemes. Councillor Culver felt that the Council needed to be more specific on investments to encourage investors to come forward. She requested more information on the other schemes; natural carbon reduction measures and the Urban Tree Fund.

Councillor Mackinnon advised that it was the intention for investments to go into the Solar PV project. However, as a result of Covid-19/social distancing, other projects had been referred to rather than identifying Solar PV in isolation. It was the hope, by the time the Bond was launched, to be in a better situation and for the Council to be able to specify what the community could invest in.

Councillor Mackinnon continued by stating that residents had pulled together and helped each other during the Covid-19 pandemic. He felt that residents would have also seen the Council stepping up, for example in helping vulnerable residents and working with businesses. Councillor Mackinnon felt that the Bond would be another way for the Council to work together with residents and have a shared commitment towards the Environment Strategy.

He reiterated that the Bond would achieve a cheaper financing rate than using the PWLB and offer good returns on a relatively low risk investment. Councillor Mackinnon stated that he was proud that West Berkshire Council was taking forward this innovative approach, as the first Council to offer investments to the community in this way.

Councillor Culver also queried the interest rate that would be offered to the public and whether Members could invest in the Bond. Councillor Mackinnon expected the interest rate for investors to be between 1% to 1.2%. The expected interest rate would be clearer by the time the Bond was launched.

Finally, Councillor Culver queried the Council's communications plan for the Bond as it was important to ensure that people were made aware of this opportunity. Councillor Mackinnon explained that there would be regular communication with residents on how their investments were progressing. Abundance Investment had a strong record on engaging with residents and providing information on investments.

The launch date for the Bond was to be reviewed to ensure it started at an appropriate time, but Councillor Mackinnon was hopeful this would be in the fairly near future.

Councillor Jeff Brooks asked whether regular reports would be provided on the level of take up of the Bond. He felt this would be useful to understand this alongside a schedule of expected investment.

Councillor Mackinnon explained that there was a low risk of not raising the necessary finance. The finance for the Bond was underwritten by a major financial institution if there was not the expected level of uptake from residents. He did however confirm that this would be aimed at residents as much as possible.

Councillor Brooks also felt that the report was not clear in explaining that the Bond would be set up on an annuity basis and asked that this be clarified.

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Councillor Mackinnon acknowledged this point. The detail would be finalised prior to launch between himself and the Executive Director for Resources, but this was intended to be an annuity with a reducing balance over a four year period.

Councillor Steve Masters referred to the expected return rate of 1% to 1.2% and queried this as this was considerably lower than many other projects that Abundance Investment were involved in. Was that a reflection of the current market?

Councillor Mackinnon could not comment on other Abundance projects, but felt that the difference in terms of return could relate to the risk profile and associated level of return. The Bond would offer a low risk investment which he felt would be very attractive to investors.

Councillor Masters also asked how the Bond would be published to residents prior to any investment. In response, Councillor Mackinnon explained that the Council would be utilising the expertise of Abundance Investment in communicating the opportunity and finding customers. This would be via a variety of communication channels. There was also a role for Members in raising awareness.

RESOLVED that:

- The results of the due diligence work had been considered and the summary noted.
- The launch of the Community Bond be approved, subject to final sign off of the necessary legal agreements delegated to the Legal Services Manager in consultation with the Executive Director (Resources).
- The Executive delegated to the Executive Director (Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, the date of the formal launch of the bond, the bond length period, and bond issue rate so long as it was below the PWLB rate.

Other options considered:

- The Council could opt to remain utilising PWLB; this is at a higher cost to the taxpayer than this route.
- Seek alternative financing routes; the Council is actively considering these, though in the current timescales, further due diligence is required before utilising any of these options.
- Neither of the other options include the ability to enhance engagement with residents over the Council's Environment Strategy.

105. Community Solutions Fund (EX3901)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 8) which recommended the closure of the current Community Solutions Fund (2017-2020) and which proposed the utilisation of the remaining budget for the development of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in West Berkshire.

Councillor Rick Jones introduced the first of two linked reports. The proposal in this report linked closely with the next item on the Executive agenda – 'Working with the Voluntary Sector'.

The current Community Solutions Fund had been set up with joint funding from West Berkshire Council and Greenham Trust to support and encourage more independent and resilient communities. Seed funding had been established for eligible projects. However, there had been limited use of this fund for its original purpose and this proposal was considered to be a better use of the funding.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried the level of awareness of the Community Solutions Fund. For instance, were newly elected Members in May 2019 made aware of this Fund? His

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understanding was that the Fund had already been closed, Councillor Abbs had attempted to apply for this funding but he did not believe this had been processed.

Councillor Jones confirmed that the Fund had not closed, this was a decision for the Executive to take. The application made by Councillor Abbs was being considered in the last funding round before the Fund was closed down.

Councillor Jones accepted the point about awareness raising. The Fund had been well publicised when it was launched three years ago. A number of projects came forward at that time but it transpired that other funding streams were able to be utilised instead. Therefore, this report proposed using the funding in a different way.

Councillor Erik Pattenden noted that only £24k had been allocated from the original fund of £400k. While the aims of the Fund had been worthy it had not proved to be a success and the proposal therefore made sense. However, Councillor Pattenden sought assurance that lessons had been learnt which would ensure that funding would be utilised for suitable causes in future.

Councillor Jones accepted that the Fund had not proved to be successful, although pointed out that some funding had been successfully put to health and wellbeing schemes. Councillor Jones confirmed that much had been learnt from the experience. This proposal in this report and the subsequent item would aim to benefit the voluntary sector moving forward.

RESOLVED that the Community Solutions Fund (2017-2020) be closed down and that any unspent budget would go into supporting initiatives that would reframe and develop the VCSE sector in West Berkshire.

Other options considered:

- It was considered appropriate to review the existing Community Solution Fund particularly as this fund had remained unspent for some considerable time. Equally, it seemed appropriate to ensure future spend is closely aligned to Council Strategy priorities. This proposal particularly fits with the Council's goal to work to deliver sustainable services through innovation and partnerships. Equally, it's clear many other of the priorities outlined in the West Berkshire Vision 2036 and Council Strategy 2019-2023 require a strong VCSE to support community resilience and reduce demand on Council services.
- Another approach would have been to revise and reshape the criteria for the Community Solutions Fund to allow it to become a more general grant stream. Demand for grants is always high and by making the fund more accessible, it would be relatively easy to deplete the budget in a small number of funding rounds.

106. Working with the Voluntary Sector (EX3903)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 9) which advised of the outcome of the recent Executive Member Strategy Board on working with the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and presented recommended actions for approval to progress.

Councillor Lynne Doherty introduced the report which followed on from the 'Community Solutions Fund' item. She stated that West Berkshire was very fortunate in having a very active and diverse VCSE sector. The willingness of residents to volunteer had become even more pronounced now than ever before, with over 3,000 residents stepping up to help their communities.

Local charities were often best placed to deliver real and tangible work and the Council wanted to work in partnership with them.

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It was recognised that there were varying skills held within the VCSE sector and there was therefore a need to re-establish an umbrella organisation for the sector that could provide independent support to all. This report sought approval of the proposals listed in paragraph 4.1 of the report which included establishing a project for this work, map existing provision and commission a Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO) using the Community Solutions Fund to do so. Further development would take place in liaison with the VCSE sector.

It was considered timely to signify this intent and progress this at this stage given the excellent examples of community response that had been experienced. Approval of this report would provide a strategic view to build on the momentum of recent weeks.

Councillor Graham Bridgman added to the words of praise from the Leader to the many volunteers and volunteer groups who had stepped forward to help their communities through the work of the Community Hub. West Berkshire's volunteers had led the way in comparison to other areas and he gave his thanks to them for all their efforts. It was important that this was built upon.

Councillor Owen Jeffery echoed the thanks to the hundreds of volunteers for their work, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. He agreed this needed to be maintained and long term relationships built. The Community Hub needed to be retained and expanded upon. He was supportive of the proposals and added that the Liberal Democrats would be a critical friend moving forward.

Councillor Doherty gave thanks for these words of support. The intention was to strengthen arrangements with the VCSE sector and the progress of this would be closely monitored.

Councillor Erik Pattenden added that this very impressive support had come from West Berkshire residents within a short period of time. He queried whether, as a result of lessons learnt in recent months and of the need to continue to harness support, any thought had been given to altering any of the proposals.

Councillor Doherty explained that the work on this had commenced pre Covid-19 in February 2020. There was not felt to be a need to change the approach. VCSE organisations operated in different ways and from holding conversations with voluntary groups it was found to be beneficial to them to not be restrained by an overly formal structure.

Councillor Lee Dillon gave his thanks to officers for their work in response to Covid-19 and to Executive Members for all their hard work.

Councillor Dillon felt that the proposal was an appropriate way forward. He did highlight that some areas of activity would not be of particular interest to voluntary groups and it was important to ensure that this work was still picked up.

Councillor Doherty acknowledged this point. The mapping exercise would help to understand which services were being picked up by the VCSE and whether there were any gaps to fill.

Councillor Rick Jones endorsed the comments that had been made. He reiterated that this work started before the Covid-19 pandemic had started. It was entirely appropriate for the Council to work more closely with the VCSE sector to maintain the recent good work.

RESOLVED that the actions recommended in this report be approved as follows:

- Establish a project to develop a strategy for working with the VCSE that reflects the following key points identified by Members.

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- Project to be governed by the Corporate Programme with agreed actions contained within a cross service project, with identified resources and agreed time frames.
- Undertake a high level mapping exercise of VCSE provision to inform the development of the emerging strategy - what is being provided, to who and where, levels of income/spend, capacity and support for the Council Strategy – scope and resources to be identified/agreed as part of the overall project.
- Commission a LIO. Process will require careful consideration of the context of current arrangements which are outside of Council funding. Source of revenue budget to be identified.
- Ownership will sit within the Resources Directorate for the period of development, supported in the project by the other Directorates and overseen by the Leader.
- The current situation in relation to Coronavirus and the impressive response of the VCSE through the work of the Community Hub be noted. This will undoubtedly reshape the relationship of the Council with the sector and therefore the proposed recommendations may need to be revisited to reflect this when the time is right. As the situation is so fluid they have been left 'as is' for the purpose of progressing this report.

Other options considered: It is possible that we could chose to do nothing, but at a national and local level policy is increasingly steering Councils towards use of the VCSE in meeting local need. Many of the priorities outlined in the West Berkshire Vision 2036 and Council Strategy 2019-2023 require a strong VCSE to support community resilience and help reduce demand on public services. To have this in place will require a more strategic approach to the relationship with the sector to set out with clarity how we will work with them, what they can expect from us and how we can best work with them to achieve our shared priorities. Therefore do nothing is not considered an option.

107. **Strategic Commissioning and Procurement (EX3878)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 10) which proposed changes for a future model of strategic commissioning and procurement, its application in the Council and presented a supporting Procurement Strategy for approval.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon in introducing the report explained that currently, the Council operated a mixed model of commissioning with those services more familiar with this approach leading the way in terms of identifying commissioning outcomes in strategies.

This proposed Strategy would provide an overarching model for all service areas to follow alongside support from the Commissioning Service. This would seek to maximise quality and achieve value for money.

An annual plan of commissioning activity would be produced which would include all procurement in excess of £100k. However, the Commissioning Service would still offer support for procurement of services at a lower cost than £100k.

Implementation of the Procurement Strategy would require the recruitment of two additional Procurement Officers.

An implementation plan was provided at Appendix D, Councillor Mackinnon explained that it might be necessary to review some of the target dates.

Councillor Jeff Brooks agreed that a clearer strategy was needed. However, he felt that some sections of the report required more detail when it came to implementing this new approach in practice.

Councillor Brooks felt that a clear business case was needed to support the recruitment of two additional officers. The return from this needed to be considered and how it would be measured. How did this extra cost compare with existing spend?

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Councillor Brooks also noted from the report that commissioning was shown as separate from procurement but the report lacked a clear definition on that.

In response to these points, Councillor Mackinnon acknowledged that the report was heavy going in some areas. However, he did point out that definitions were included early on in the report, including an attempt to define commissioning and procurement, and show the difference between the two.

Councillor Mackinnon did not have to hand the existing spend and offered to provide that at a later date. However, it was felt that a more efficient and joined up approach would result in the two new officers paying for themselves through their work.

As a strategy, this would not contain all the detail to support implementation of the new model.

Councillor Brooks was pleased to hear there would be additional resources, but the outcome this achieved needed to be monitored. The professional input to service areas was important, but services were clear on their requirements and Councillor Brooks felt that there should not be too much reliance on centralisation.

Councillor Mackinnon acknowledged the point made on centralisation. He explained that the new approach would not be a one size fits all. The Commissioning Service would aim to work in partnership with service areas, but the progress of this would be closely monitored.

Councillor Erik Pattenden referred to the difficulties experienced with the tendering process for the school meals and school cleaning contracts. He questioned whether this Strategy would avoid such issues in future.

Councillor Mackinnon explained that it was the clear intention for the new model to make procurement more efficient and successful at all levels.

Councillor Dominic Boeck added that a key piece of learning from this process was for the Commissioning Service and service areas to work more closely together. The learning from this experience would feed into the new Procurement Strategy.

Councillor Pattenden also referred to Appendix A, specifically the Family Hub Strategy which stated that the requirements to deliver this particular strategy were unclear. He queried when this would be understood.

Councillor Mackinnon advised that some areas did need further detail. Much work had gone into producing the Strategy and areas identified as 'not clear' would be updated in due course.

RESOLVED to:

- Approve the proposed changes and the Procurement Strategy for implementation across the Council.
- Approve the implementation plan as set out in this report to start in 2020/21 for the tenders in the service areas identified.

Other options considered: Do nothing and maintain current arrangements. Developing the commissioning function within the Council has been a recommendation from LGA Peer review and identified as a corporate priority in the Corporate Programme. In the current devolved model opportunities are being missed to improve on a range of outcomes including commercial social value, green agenda and for a clearer strategic direction. Do nothing is not a realistic option if the Council wishes to progress in line with other local authorities to achieve a more strategic approach to commissioning.

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108. **Economic Development Strategy and Delivery Plan (EX3758)**

The Executive considered the Economic Development Strategy (EDS) and Economic Development Delivery Plan (EDSDP) (Agenda Item 11). The new EDS would run until 2023 and it aligned with the Council's strategic commitment to promote economic development.

Councillor Hilary Cole introduced the report. She explained that the EDS would replace the previous version that ended in 2018.

An Economic Development Board was established in late 2018 to consider how best to take this work forward. A number of service areas were involved and they helped to draft material for each of the different chapters.

Progress had also been made by the Economic Development Manager who promoted the approach to economic development at a number of engagement events which included Parish and Town Council meetings, as well as attending stakeholder and network meetings of the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company.

A six week period of consultation was held in July 2019 and consultation comments had been incorporated in to the EDS.

The EDS and EDSDP would have been presented to the Executive in December 2019 but this was prevented by the purdah period and since that time much effort had gone to supporting businesses in response to Covid-19.

Councillor Cole was aware of concerns that the Council was looking to adopt the EDS at such a challenging time for the economy. While she understood these concerns, the EDS would provide a firm foundation upon which to work with partners which included the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) who would be leading work on economic recovery.

Councillor Cole added that West Berkshire was better placed than many other areas. The local economy was in a strong position pre Covid-19. Many West Berkshire businesses and were able to work remotely as was the Council.

The commitment to deliver the EDS and continue to support businesses was evidenced by the strengthening of the Economic Development Service. The Economic Development Officer had been promoted to the Manager role and additional staff would be recruited to maintain the level of support to businesses in West Berkshire. Councillor Cole added that the EDS could be adapted to suit emerging needs.

Councillor Cole concluded her introduction by thanking officers in Finance for their work in helping to assist businesses, i.e. through processing Business Rate relief requests and in processing grant applications from businesses.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon gave his support to the recommendation. He took the opportunity to provide an update to Members on the processing of grant applications. To date, 1,991 claim forms had been received and 1,543 had been processed. The time taken between the receipt of the grant form and the payment to businesses was three days. £19m had been paid to businesses so far from the Government grant which totalled £29m. Finally, Councillor Mackinnon explained that the average grant paid out to businesses was £12.3k when the total amount available per grant was £25k. This showed that on average, a greater proportion of smaller businesses were claiming the grant.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that in present circumstances, there would be changes to the economy in the years to come, but these changes were uncertain. More people were working from home, but it was uncertain how this would impact on the use of office

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space. The EDS was only proposed until 2023 and Councillor Brooks queried why this relatively short term strategy had not been put on hold. It had already been delayed for the reasons explained.

Councillor Brooks also noted that reference was made in the document to a hope to achieve certain targets and a hope to implement changes etc. He felt the EDS lacked certainty and ambition that areas of work would be completed.

Councillor Brooks had been advised of the number of companies that had been consulted, but he queried whether meetings had been arranged with large local employers such as Vodafone as part of the consultation or had they merely been written to?

The Liberal Democrat Group felt that more work was needed on the EDS and they could not support it in its present form.

Councillor Cole was disappointed to note the final point from Councillor Brooks. Although added that was not surprised when considering how strongly Councillor Brooks felt about economic development. Councillor Cole referred back to her introductory points which included that the EDS would need to be adapted due to the present unprecedented circumstances.

Councillor Cole continued by stating her view that it was better to have a new proactive EDS in place rather than retaining the old reactive version.

She acknowledged the point made about being hopeful for achievements and felt this was another example of the Council hiding its light under a bushel rather than lacking ambition. There was however a need to be realistic as well as aiming for high standards.

Councillor Cole felt that this was a sound document for present circumstances. The EDSDP would help to achieve much with local businesses.

She concluded by stating that the Economic Development Manager had held meetings across the district, to a larger extent than ever previously, and as a result had made strong contacts within larger down to smaller businesses. A wide range of businesses had been approached and spoken to rather than via a form filling exercise.

Councillor Lynne Doherty supported this point by advising that she had attended meetings of the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company and met many employees to hear their views.

Councillor Lee Dillon commented that there was a clear understanding amongst Liberal Democrat Members that the other papers presented to this meeting would be subject to changes as a result of Covid-19. However, the Group felt that economic changes would be so transformational that the EDS would become out of date soon after being approved. He noted that progress would be reviewed, but he sought a commitment that update reports would be presented to Executive on a quarterly basis as part of this review. This was important when considering that the economy underpinned many important areas of Council activity.

Councillor Doherty responded to this point by advising that she had meet with the LEP and they had an existing economic strategy. The LEP also recognised that it was important to have a strategy as a baseline.

The LEP would be leading on much of the economic recovery work across the Thames Valley and therefore it was only right to consider the timetable they were working to so that the LEP, the Council and businesses could work in partnership before committing to a schedule for reviewing the document. Councillor Doherty did however give her support to conducting reviews once the timetable had been considered.

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Councillor Dillon noted this response, but felt it would still be useful in the meantime to receive updates on local initiatives. He would also welcome himself and Councillor Brooks having sight of the timetable referred to.

Councillor Doherty confirmed that work was ongoing on the timetable, but it would be shared in due course.

Councillor Cole endorsed the view that the Council would be working closely with the LEP and local businesses. It was important to align the Council's activity with that of the LEP. Progress would be reported at a future date.

RESOLVED that the Economic Development Strategy and Economic Development Strategy Delivery Plan be approved.

Other options considered: Not approving the Economic Development Strategy and Economic Development Strategy Delivery Plan. This option is not recommended given the Council's commitments as outlined in the Council Strategy 2019-2023.

109. HWRC Opening Hour Changes (EX3834)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 12) which set out recommendations for proposed opening hour changes for the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). This followed the successful completion of the recent trial expansion of opening hours at the Padworth site and engagement with residents on proposed new opening hours for both HWRCs.

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter introduced the report and explained that prior to the summer of 2019, the Padworth HWRC was restricted in comparison to the long established site at Newtown Road as its hours were limited and it was restricted to green waste only.

During the summer of 2019, the Council began a trial period of extended opening hours and an ability to receive more materials.

The trial had proven very successful in displacing some of the demand on the Newtown Road HWRC. It had also resulted in an increase in overall site usage across the District. Residents living in the east of the district could take their waste to Padworth and did not need to travel to Newtown Road. Residents had been surveyed and there were very supportive of the extended service.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter recommended approval of the proposal to have an equal service across the two HWRCs with opening hours of 9am to 6pm throughout the year, with the exception of later opening one day a week at Newtown Road during the summer months. The additional cost to be incurred was felt to be relatively modest (in the region of £20k to £40k per annum).

The reopening date of the HWRCs could not yet be confirmed. The Government had yet to indicate when they could reopen, but the Council was eager to resume normal service. The Council was actively planning for the reopening which included appropriate safety measures.

Councillor Dominic Boeck seconded the report by stating the importance of residents living in the east of the district being able to access the same level of service as the rest of West Berkshire.

Councillor Graham Bridgman was very pleased at this proposal. He was routinely questioned by residents in his ward on this matter who wanted longer opening hours and the ability to dispose of more items at Padworth which offered an excellent facility.

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Councillor Adrian Abbs also welcomed this development. He considered it likely that there would be a backlog of waste that residents would wish to dispose of and he queried whether extended hours could be offered in the evening in the opening weeks to accommodate this as well as still being able to ensure social distancing by users.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter agreed these were important points for consideration. He agreed there would likely be a backlog. HWRCs did not have car parks and a number of residents could seek to use the sites soon after they were able to reopen. This could result in queuing being a factor. It was therefore important to widely publicise the reopening and identify ways to manage the backlog in an efficient manner.

Councillor Alan Macro queried if a later opening one day a week would be possible for Padworth as would be the case at Newtown Road. It was also the case that some materials could not be accepted at Padworth and he queried whether this could be extended.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter explained that there was a low demand in the evenings for use of both HWRCs, with a lower demand in Padworth. However, the option could be taken of trialling longer hours on a temporary basis.

On the subject of extending the materials that could be accepted, this would require additional staffing and to date this had not been a workable option. However, it was the hope that usage would grow and the range of materials could be extended. Councillor Ardagh-Walter considered this part of the ongoing evolution of the service.

Councillor Macro reported that complaints/concerns had recently been raised with regard to an increase in bonfires and fly tipping. He hoped that the Council would be in a position to reopen its HWRCs as soon as the Government gave approval to do so.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter was aware of these issues. Recent communications from the Council had been to encourage residents to act appropriately. He too hoped that the HWRCs could soon reopen and the concerns mentioned could be resolved relatively swiftly.

Further details would be shared on reopening as soon as they were known.

Councillor Lee Dillon queried the selection of Thursday evenings for the later opening. For example, had Monday evenings been considered so that residents could dispose of waste collected over weekends.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter could not recall the reasoning for selecting Thursdays. However, this was subject to analysis and he offered further detail on this point in writing.

Councillor Dillon also asked if consideration had been given to ways to alleviate high traffic volumes accessing the sites.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter agreed that this was an area of concern. A resolution being given serious consideration was to implement a booking system to help manage the volume of those on the sites. This was a challenge the Council was striving to meet.

RESOLVED that the opening hours of the HWRCs be approved as follows (effective from 1 May 2020 or the earliest practicable date after that time, subject to the ability to reopen the sites in the context of the Covid-19 situation):

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HWRC Site	Winter Hours (October to March)	Summer Hours (April to September)
Padworth HWRC	9am to 6pm	9am to 6pm (7 days a week*)
Newtown Road	9am to 6pm	9am to 6pm (7 days a week apart from Thursdays) 9am to 8pm (Thursdays only)

** The Council's sites are open every day of the year including Bank Holidays, with the exception of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.*

Other options considered:

- The following options were presented to Operations Board in December 2019:

Option	Option Description	Estimated Additional Annual Cost to WBC	Estimated Monthly invoice over 12 months
Option 1	9am – 6pm standard opening hours at both Newtown Road and Padworth	£10,673.71	£889.48
Option 2	9am – 6pm at both sites plus 2 summer evening hours at Newtown Road only (all days)	£72,748.57	£6,062.38
Option 3	9am – 6pm at both sites plus 2 summer evening hours for a day at Newtown Road	£19,541.55	£1,628.46
Option 4	9am – 6pm at both sites plus 1 summer evening hour at Newtown Road (all days)	£41,711.14	£3,475.93
Option 5	9am – 6pm at both sites plus 1 summer evening hour for a day at Newtown Road	£15,107.63	£1,258.97

- Operations Board supported the recommendation of Option 3 above as the Preferred Option. The recommended option achieves a good balance between providing a high level of service access to residents and delivering value for money. It will provide a high level of standardisation of hours between the Council's two sites and also allow flexibility for extended summer opening on Thursdays at Newtown Road.
- A public engagement exercise conducted on the HWRCs during 21 - 24 February 2020 shows that prior to the public engagement exercise, most residents were not aware of the proposed changes. This was entirely expected because the purpose of the exercise was to increase awareness. Data obtained from the survey shows that residents are broadly supportive of the proposed changes, with most respondents either agreeing with changes or saying that they will not be adversely impacted. A summary of the recent survey has been included under Appendix C. The proposed new hours have also been communicated via the Council's website.

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- It was intended that resident communications will be sustained in the period leading up to the implementation of proposed changes. However, due to the recent COVID-19 situation which has resulted in the temporary closure of the HWRC sites, we have paused our efforts to notify residents about the new hours to avoid confusing the public. Communications will be picked up again once the situation allows and before implementation.

110. Members' Questions

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

(a) **Question submitted by Councillor Steve Masters to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of the status of the football ground on the London Road Industrial Estate was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing.

(b) **Question submitted by Councillor Steve Masters to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of the Playing Pitch Strategy and the use of Faraday Road was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing.

(c) **Question submitted by Councillor Carolyne Culver to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver on the subject of whether care workers would receive full pay if they needed to shield and/or self-isolate was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care.

(d) **Question submitted by Councillor Carolyne Culver to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver on the subject of whether care workers had access to the all the PPE they needed was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care.

(e) **Question submitted by Councillor Carolyne Culver to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver asking the Council to liaise with BBOWT in relation to the reopening of car parks at Greenham and Snelsmore Commons was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside.

(f) **Question submitted by Councillor Carolyne Culver to the Portfolio Holder for Environment**

A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver on the subject of whether all residents would be permitted to use the green garden bin regardless of whether or not they had paid was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 7.12pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature