COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY, 6 OCTOBER 2022

Councillors Present in the Council Chamber: Rick Jones (Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Steve Ardagh-Walter, Phil Barnett, Jeff Beck, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Jeff Brooks, Hilary Cole, James Cole, Jeremy Cottam, Carolyne Culver, Lynne Doherty, Billy Drummond, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Tony Linden, Royce Longton, Ross Mackinnon, Thomas Marino, David Marsh, Steve Masters, Geoff Mayes, Andy Moore, Biyi Oloko, Graham Pask, Claire Rowles, Garth Simpson, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers, Andrew Williamson, Keith Woodhams and Howard Woollaston.

Councillors present remotely: Councillor Gareth Hurley.

Also present in the Council Chamber: Honorary Aldermen Paul Bryant and Andrew Rowles, Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director (Resources)), Eric Owens (Interim Executive Director (Place)), Paul Coe (Service Director – Adult Social Care), Shiraz Sheikh (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic Service and Deputy Monitoring Officer) and Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager).

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received from: Councillor Alan Law, Councillor Jeff Cant, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor Nassar Hunt, Councillor Alan Macro and Councillor Erik Pattenden, Honorary Aldermen Keith Chopping, Adrian Edwards and Graham Jones, and Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)).

PART I

40. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman invited Members to reflect on the recent passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. He mentioned the profound affect Her Majesty had had on us all, and the magnificent example she had set of putting service before self. Her Majesty was a role model of togetherness, caring and good governance. The Chairman was sure she would want us to remember her with great fondness, but also look to the future and make it as positive as possible for everyone. As Councillors, the Chairman believed there was no better example to follow in serving the people of West Berkshire. The Chairman then held a Minute's Silence in respect for Her Majesty The Queen.

The Chairman reported that sixteen events had been attended since the last meeting of Council, some of which were related to the royal mourning and Proclamation. He expressed his gratitude to Councillor Clive Hooker for stepping in on occasions when both he and the Vice-Chairman had been unavailable.

The Chairman reported that he had visited a number of voluntary organisations, many of those supporting vulnerable people. Both he and the Chairman's Lady continued to be awed by the excellent work that they did, and the huge voluntary effort that was mounted every day.

The Chairman referred to the Citizenship Ceremony held last month, which was particularly poignant for the first new citizens in the district to swear allegiance to His Majesty The King.

The Chairman noted that Mr Shiraz Sheikh, the Deputy Monitoring Officer, would be leaving the authority shortly and thanked him on behalf of all Members for his support.

Prior to the Chairman making his remarks, Councillor Jeff Brooks had thanked the Chairman, the Leader of Council, the Deputy Leader of Council, the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer, the Deputy Monitoring Officer and all other officers involved, for their part in the refurbishment of the Council Chamber, and expressed his delight at the return to the usual debating rules.

41. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2022 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendment:

Item 24. Declarations of Interest and Item 37. Motion on Royal Berkshire Hospital Redevelopment – to reflect that the interest declared by Councillor Graham Bridgman was a personal interest and not an other registrable interest.

42. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Claire Rowles indicated her intention to abstain on any votes taken during the meeting whilst she awaited clarity on a conflict of interest point.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 18. Notices of Motion and determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

43. Petitions

Councillor Phil Barnett presented a petition containing 18 signatures which requested the Council to consider adding parts of Queens Road to existing resident parking schemes. The Chairman stated that this petition would be reviewed by officers who would confirm to Councillor Barnett within ten days what action would be taken on it.

Councillor Steve Masters presented a petition which requested that 'hedgehog highways' become a planning condition. The Chairman stated that this petition would be reviewed by officers who would confirm to Councillor Masters within ten days what action would be taken on it.

44. Public Questions

The Chairman advised that Question F as published in the agenda had been rejected by the Monitoring Officer under Rule 4.12.3 as it related to a planning application, an ongoing complaint and required the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

The Chairman advised that Question G as published in the agenda had been rejected by the Monitoring Officer under Rule 4.12.3 as it required the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

A full transcription of the public question and answer session is available from the following link: Transcription of Q&As.

(a) A question standing in the name of Mr Joseph Tolman-Lopez on the subject of the parking situation on Argyle Road was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(b) A question standing in the name of Ms Paula Saunderson on the subject of a request for a Surface Water Management Plan for Clayhill Ward was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(c) A question standing in the name of Mr Paul Morgan on the subject of the recommendations from the London Road Industrial Estate Task Group was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

(d) A question standing in the name of Mr John Gotelee on the subject of the creation of jobs on the London Road Industrial Estate was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.
(e) A question standing in the name of Mr Alan Pearce on the subject of the release of surface water runoff from the new A339 London Road Industrial Estate junction was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(f) This question was rejected by the Monitoring Officer under Rule 4.12.3.
(g) This question was rejected by the Monitoring Officer under Rule 4.12.3.
(h) A question standing in the name of Mr Simon Pike on the subject of the proposed intervention for Newbury and Thatcham bus enhancements was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(i) A question standing in the name of Ms Paula Saunderson on the subject of applying for Surface Water Programme funding from Thames Water was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(j) A question standing in the name of Mr Alan Pearce on the subject of individual sites on the London Road Industrial Estate complying with common drainage law and planning policy was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.
(k) A question standing in the name of Mr John Gotelee on the subject of whether the London Road Industrial Estate refresh project was fully costed was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

45. Membership of Committees

There were no proposed changes to the membership of Committees for Council to consider.

46. Motions from Previous Meetings

Members were asked to note the response to a Motion from Councillor Adrian Abbs on 'Helping the Taxi Trade Go Greener' which had been tabled at a previous Council meeting. As the Motion had been discussed and responded to by the Executive at its meeting on 22 September 2022, it was not proposed to revisit the discussion on this item at this meeting.

47. Licensing Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Licensing Committee had not met.

Councillor Tony Vickers highlighted how on occasions the draft Minutes of previous Committee meetings mentioned in the Council agenda were not available for consideration. The Chairman noted this point and requested that officers review this issue subsequent to the meeting.

48. Personnel Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Personnel Committee had not met.

49. Governance and Ethics Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Governance and Ethics Committee had met on 25 July and 26 September 2022.

50. District Planning Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the District Planning Committee had not met.

51. Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission had met on 6 September 2022.

52. Health Scrutiny Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Health Scrutiny Committee had met on 20 September 2022.

53. Health and Wellbeing Board

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Health and Wellbeing Board had met on 21 July 2022.

54. Joint Public Protection Committee

The Council noted that, since its last meeting, the Joint Public Protection Committee had not met.

55. Updates to the Constitution (C4260)

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 17) which provided an update on the work undertaken by the Constitution Review Task Group to date, and proposed the approval of Constitutional updates. The report also advised of the further work that would be undertaken in anticipation of further revisions due to be brought forward to Council in December 2022.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Thomas Marino and seconded by Councillor Graham Bridgman:

"That Council:

(a) approves the Meeting Rules including the Meeting Rules Table, the Questions Appendix, and the Petitions Appendix, which are attached at Appendix A to this Report;
(b) approves the Council Rules, which are attached at Appendix B to this Report;
(c) approves the Executive Rules, which are attached at Appendix C to this Report;
(d) approves the Council Bodies Rules, which are attached at Appendix D to this Report;
(e) approves the following Bodies Rules, which are attached at Appendix E to this Report:
- Appeals Appendix
- Governance Appendix
- Health and Wellbeing Appendix
- Health Scrutiny Appendix
- Joint Public Protection Committee Appendix
- Licensing Appendix
- Licensing Sub-Committee Appendix
- Personnel Appendix
- Planning Appendix
- Scrutiny Appendix

(f) notes that the above Rules will replace current Parts of the Constitution, namely:
- Part 4 – Council Rules of Procedure
- Part 5 – Executive Rules of Procedure
- Part 6 – Overview and Scrutiny Rules of Procedure
- Part 7 – Regulatory and Other Committees
- Part 12 – Personnel Rules of Procedure

- Part 13 - Codes and Protocols – Appendix A - West Berkshire Code of Conduct for Planning
- Part 13 – Codes and Protocols - Appendix B - Protocol for Decision-Making by Individual Executive Members
- Part 13 - Codes and Protocols - Appendix B1– Individual Decision making Process
- Part 13 - Codes and Protocols – Appendix C - Procedure Rules for Dealing with representations
- Part 13 - Codes and Protocols - Appendix G - West Berkshire Code of Conduct for Licensing
- Part 13 - Codes and Protocols – Appendix I - Councillor Call for Action Protocol

(g) agrees that the changes to the Constitution detailed in this report take effect from 1 January 2023;

(h) delegates to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Constitution Review Task Group the power to make minor additional corrections to the parts of the Constitution to ensure consistency in terminology and presentation.

Councillor Marino introduced the report and commended the work of the officers and Members involved in the Task Group. He highlighted how this had begun as a 'tidying up' exercise which had evolved in to a consolidation process, and believed Members would agree that the new parts formed a cohesive whole containing all pertinent information. Councillor Marino confirmed that the documents required further typographical and tidying edits, and a glossary was being developed to capture a number of defined terms used throughout. He referred to the recommendation delegating authority to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Constitution Review Task Group, to make minor additional corrections and noted the intent to take any revisions to a future meeting of the Task Group for robustness. More substantive amendments required as identified by the Monitoring Officer would subsequently be brought before Council for consideration.

Councillor Andy Moore advised he had been a member of the Task Group since its inception and that he supported the Motion. He also commended the work of officers, and in particular the work of the Chairman of the Task Group, Councillor Graham Bridgman.

Councillor David Marsh indicated his support for the Motion and praised the Chairman of the Task Group for his patience and editing skills, and also in taking forward the work with courtesy and a cross party consensus. He then highlighted his political group's position that constitutional amendments should be taken further, in particular the abolishment of the executive decision-making model and a return to a committee system.

Councillor Graham Bridgman thanked Councillors Moore and Marsh for their kind words, and expressed gratitude to the officers for their sterling work and to the members of the Task Group for their involvement. He widened his thanks to all those Members who engaged with the two workshops that were held, as well as to the various Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen who had engaged with a paper process looking at revisions relating to particular Committees and Boards. Councillor Bridgman encouraged his colleagues to report any minor issues they identified in the draft documents to him and the Monitoring Officer.

In conclusion, Councillor Marino also expressed his thanks to officers and the members of the Task Group and invited Council to support the Motion.

The Motion was put to the vote and duly **RESOLVED**.

56. Notices of Motion

Councillor Jeremy Cottam declared an interest in Agenda Item 18. Notices of Motion (Motion E: Declaring a Cost of Living Emergency) by virtue of his involvement with the Thatcham Chamber of Commerce. As his interest was a personal interest he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

The Chairman advised that he would be revising the order of Motions as published on the agenda and bringing forward Motion E (Declaring a Cost of Living Emergency) for consideration immediately following Motion C (Cost of Living) to reflect the similarity in subject matter. He also advised that Motion F would be withdrawn from consideration.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda Item 18(a) refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Lynne Doherty relating to the Local Government Association (LGA) 'Debate not Hate' campaign.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Lynne Doherty and seconded by Councillor Thomas Marino:

"Building on what we agreed in our Motion on Civility in Politics, this Council supports the LGA 'Debate not Hate' campaign.

This Council:

- agrees that anyone, regardless of their background or political affiliation, should feel safe to become a Councillor and be proud to represent their community.
- believes that the increasing level of abuse and intimidation aimed at local politicians is preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election and undermining local democracy.
- will support the campaign to raise public awareness of the role of Councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.
- asks the Leader of the Council to sign the LGA's public statement on behalf of the Council, and encourages all Councillors to individually sign the statement and share that they have done so on social media also".

Councillor Doherty advised she had submitted this Motion following her attendance at the LGA Conference, where the report on abuse and intimidation faced by Councillors had been released and had contained key findings and recommendations. The LGA summary report recognised that the right to object and constructively challenge were both key components of democracy, but abuse and intimidation crossed the line into unacceptable behaviour and served to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics. Councillor Doherty noted that regular abuse for many Councillors was an everyday occurrence, and highlighted the negative impact on encouraging potential female candidates this had. She believed that all elected role models had a part to play, and that it was not acceptable to be subjected to abuse from either the public or fellow Councillors. Councillor Doherty invited Council to support the LGA campaign by agreeing to sign its public statement, and to also lead by example and help cease the normalisation of abusive behaviour.

Councillor Jeff Brooks expressed his view that social media attracted people who believed anonymity allowed them to be abusive. He stated that the abuse of people in public office was unacceptable, though he felt part of it came from being associated with a political party. Councillor Brooks indicated his support for the Motion and encouraged the parties to go further by helping potential candidates to understand the rewards of the role. He also encouraged the Administration to review and improve the tone in which they responded to public questioners at meetings.

Councillor Adrian Abbs supported the Motion and referred to the recent opportunity presented at Greenfest to remove the politics out of environmental issues but which had unfortunately been cancelled. He noted that he had been taken aback when first elected at the tone of debate amongst Members, but felt that this had been improving.

Councillor Martha Vickers supported the Motion and referred to a Council organised debate she had taken part in to try and encourage more women into politics. She felt further work was also required on engaging with young people, building on current initiatives already in place in some Town Councils. Councillor Vickers also wished to provide reassurance that instances of abuse when knocking on doors were rare.

Councillor David Marsh referred to a racist incident he had witnessed whilst campaigning before Brexit. He believed that some members of the government could set a better example and improve the public perception of politicians. Councillor Marsh also referred to examples of behaviour displayed by senior Councillors in the Administration which he felt did not display courtesy and respect as required in the Code of Conduct.

Councillor Steve Masters supported the Motion but referred to Members from across the parties having expressed dissatisfaction at abuse received from within their own groups which he also felt needed to be addressed.

Councillor Carolyne Culver supported the Motion and noted that she had not personally received abuse from residents. However, she believed that a growing issue for local councillors was being compared to politicians in Parliament and having to face criticism as a result of their actions. She felt that potential candidates were being deterred due to the allowance, the time commitment, the impact on family commitments, and the perception of no traction or influence. Councillor Culver supported the abolishment of the Executive decision-making system, as she felt the committee system would allow the public to see that all Councillors had an input and could encourage them to stand for election. Councillor Culver wanted to highlight that, though accused of such, she had not criticised a fellow Councillor for taking paternity leave. She also stated that, as a Member of a political party, Councillors should probably expect criticism of policies. She argued that an increase in Independent Councillors who wanted to represent their residents and not a political party in the Chamber would be of benefit, but that potential candidates were put off by the tone of debate and what was happening nationally.

Councillor Keith Woodhams advised that he did not use social media and so would therefore be unable to promote that he had individually signed the statement as per the last bullet point in the Motion.

Councillor Claire Rowles wanted to endorse the position of encouraging more women in to politics whom she believed were being put off due to the abuse received. She indicated that she would have been in support of the Motion if she were not abstaining from all votes.

Councillor Tony Linden supported the Motion and referred to the difficulties in recruiting candidates. He suggested that all Members should be careful about what they say, and to be mindful of humility and treating people with respect in accordance with the Code of Conduct and the Nolan Principles.

Councillor Tony Vickers noted the historic spacing in chambers of ‘two swords’ length’ between parties which gave an indication as to how passionate debating used to be and which he felt had not gone away. He highlighted that more than two sides were required to avoid a confrontational style of debate, and that the breaking down of the political parties into smaller groups to create a multi-party system would be healthier for

democratic debate. He also argued that a move towards proportional representation would improve participation in democracy at every level.

Councillor Marino confirmed that he relished a robust debate as it was the art of arguing a position in the marketplace of ideas. However, he felt that personal attacks had no place in politics. He accepted that not everyone would agree with his political group or the decisions taken by them, but felt that discourse between those with a difference in public opinion should be carried out in the spirit of mutual respect. He highlighted that some Councillors would not be deterred by derogatory personal attacks but that this did not apply to all, especially given that it had escalated into physical attacks on some Councillors as reported across the country. In conclusion, he called upon Members to remember just how important civility in public life was.

In summing up, Councillor Doherty agreed that debating and disagreeing with one another was a healthy part of democracy but abuse and intimidation crossed the line into dangerous territory. She noted that social media was a platform with which to talk to people that might be interested in her views and therefore could not be avoided, but argued that a differing viewpoint did not allow others to make her a target for abuse. Councillor Doherty confirmed that she had individually signed the pledge but wanted to sign it on behalf of West Berkshire Council to encourage people, irrespective of political views and beliefs, to work collectively and with respect for each other. She concluded by thanking Members for their support.

The Motion was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda Item 18(b) refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Adrian Abbs regarding high street canopies. The Chairman advised that notice of a minor alteration to the Motion had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting, and it was the altered version being proposed by Councillor Abbs and seconded by Councillor Tony Vickers.

The Chairman advised that Council would not debate the Motion and, in accordance with Rule 4.9.8, this would be referred to the Environment Advisory Group and then to Executive for consideration as the detail of the Motion fell within the remit of the Executive. A report would be considered by the Environment Advisory Group and then by Executive and the outcome of that would be reported to Council.

ALTERED MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Adrian Abbs and seconded by Councillor Tony Vickers:

“Given the constant temperature rises seen year on year (especially in the summer months) it is becoming critical to protect both ourselves and our economy by providing shade for humans, business and wildlife.

Therefore:

This Council notes:

- That Climate change is leading to higher temperatures.
- That Green Canopy cover can help significantly with providing shade.
- That Newbury Town Council have passed a motion asking for WBC assistance to achieve this.
- That some trees that existed previously are missing.
- That some trees are showing signs of stress due to either their location, care regime, or age.

This Council therefore resolves to:

- Approach interested parties (such as Parish and Town councils as well as bodies such as Newbury BID) to gauge their willingness to be involved in a rapid roll out of Green Canopies on their high streets.
- Commit to beginning a program of investigation on various methods of achieving green canopies that could be applied to the various scenarios that will be found in West Berkshire.
- Commit to replacing any existing missing trees such as the one on Newbury High Street.
- Undertake a quick survey of all trees to ascertain their current condition.
- Create a forward plan for any tree identified as needing attention".

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda Item 18(c) refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Lynne Doherty regarding the cost of living, a minor alteration to which had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting.

ALTERED MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Lynne Doherty and seconded by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter:

"This Council is concerned about the effect that the increase in the cost of living is having on the residents of West Berkshire.

This Council notes that if it weren't for the intervention announced by the new Prime Minister, Liz Truss, domestic electricity and gas prices would have risen by 80% in October, with further increases expected in January.

This Council welcomes the financial support offered, such as the new Energy Price Cap, the Energy Bills Support Scheme, and the Discretionary Fund, as well as the commitment to raise the supply of energy – particularly clean energy such as nuclear, wind, and solar.

This Council resolves to request that the Executive use the funding provided by HM Government to help residents of West Berkshire. Including, but not limited to: asking anyone who has not received their £150 rebate to get in touch so that can be distributed; encouraging residents to check if they are eligible for Council Tax Reduction; using the Household Support Fund to support those most in need with household costs such as energy bills, food, clothing and housing costs in exceptional circumstances; and considering what additional action the Council can take to help the residents of West Berkshire".

Councillor Doherty raised concerns around the cost of living crisis being faced by many residents and noted that preparation for the winter months had already begun. She referred to the recent experience of assisting residents through a crisis, and the successful partnership with the Greenham Trust and the Volunteer Centre looking at a hub model to support residents coming forward. She noted that a discussion on this subject matter had also already taken place at the Health and Wellbeing Board. Councillor Doherty confirmed that the Council would be receiving around £695k for its third tranche of the Household Support Grant, and referenced what had been done with the funding already received. The Motion recognised the difficulties being faced in the pockets of deprivation in the district, and Councillor Doherty explained the importance of making sure that those in need of help and support knew where to go for it. She particularly welcomed the Energy Price Guarantee as a way of saving the typical average household around £1k, and the conversations taking place regarding free school meals in holiday periods as well as other ways of providing support to those in need.

Councillor Jeff Brooks argued that the Motion had no substance and had been written by Conservative Headquarters to boost the beleaguered Prime Minister. He questioned why

this Council should support the actions of a troubled government, and suggested the Motion resolved to take actions on matters that would be undertaken anyway (such as the distribution of funding) and was therefore wasting the time of the Council. Councillor Brooks indicated that his political group would be abstaining on this vote because the Motion would not achieve anything.

Councillor Martha Vickers referred to the report considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board at its recent meeting which outlined some good initiatives being proposed, though concerns had been expressed regarding the availability of central government funding to deliver all the proposals. She suggested that all Members read the report due to the serious matters addressed within it, and that more interest should be taken in the work of the Board. It had been suggested at the Board meeting that the cost of living emergency could be approached in a manner similar to the response to the Covid 19 emergency with the creation of a sub-group of the Board to consider proposals. Councillor Vickers then referred to the grant funding from government which was welcomed, but noted that if the government did not ensure that benefits kept pace with inflation then the grants would be negated.

Councillor Adrian Abbs expressed dissatisfaction that the Motion congratulated the Prime Minister given the issues being faced which he believed had been caused by twelve years of Conservative government. He stated that successive governments had not been focussed on solutions which could have been producing cleaner and cheaper energy by now. He also argued that the real issue with energy costs was the increase to standing charges, resulting in expensive bills even with a reduction in use. Councillor Abbs called for a general election so that it would be clear which manifesto people wanted to support.

Councillor David Marsh expressed his astonishment at the Prime Minister being named and praised in the Motion given previous examples of opposition Motions having been criticised for being too political. He referred to the Council decision not to provide £40k of funding to the Food Bank which would have enabled it to employ extra staff members to help share the burden of work that it was currently facing, primarily driven by the £20 a week Universal Credit cut that he felt was taken unilaterally and unreasonably off the poorest people in the community. He believed that this Motion did not go far enough to address the very real crisis that residents were facing, and found it incredible that in a wealthy country people were reliant on food banks, charities, churches and libraries. He also noted that there was no reference to fracking within the Motion given the central government agenda on this issue.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed his disappointment that the opposition had questioned why they should support what the government was doing, which had included a commitment of £150b to support the energy price cap, the £150 Council Tax rebate given to all residents in Bands A to D, the Warm Homes discount, and the Household Support Fund. He argued that all Members should work together to deal with the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Tony Vickers indicated that he would not support a Motion calling on Members to note what the Prime Minister was doing. He expressed disappointment in the process that had led to the appointment of the new Prime Minister, and confusion over the differing strands of conservatism displayed over the last twelve years of government.

Councillor Howard Woollaston raised a point of order that Councillor Tony Vickers statement was not concerned with or relevant to the Motion. Councillor Tony Vickers argued that as the Prime Minister was mentioned in the Motion he could refer to her, and that he was responding to the query from Councillor Mackinnon regarding why the opposition did not support Conservative decisions.

Councillor Tony Vickers continued by setting out his belief that the election of the Prime Minister had been an abuse of democracy and that a general election should have been called. He outlined how his political party had wanted to insulate homes with a view to reducing fuel costs, as well as investing in renewable energy far more seriously than had been done. He noted that his group were happy at the initiatives that had been put in place so far to help people with the cost of living crisis, but they felt it was happening too late.

Councillor Owen Jeffery referred to the responsibility of the Council for many millions of pounds and many vital services, and expressed his shame on behalf of the Council that it was being asked to support what he viewed as a sycophantic Motion. He argued that the Motion had no substance and would make no difference in addressing the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Biyi Oloko referred to the war in Ukraine and the subsequent effect on energy prices in the UK, and explained how he believed supporting the government helped to minimise discord and focus on the relevant issues. He supported the Motion as he felt that extraordinary times called for extraordinary actions.

Councillor Steve Masters expressed his unease at the specific mention of the Prime Minister in the Motion. In response to Councillor Mackinnon, he explained that his group did support the £150b for the energy price cap but not in the method it was done. He argued it had shored up the profits that the energy companies had made off the back of rising prices when they could have been made to forgo some of that in a tax. Councillor Masters felt that the policies of the current government pandered to Conservative Party donors whilst everyone else suffered. He concluded by commending and thanking the officers he had dealt with to facilitate the warm spaces proposed by the churches and voluntary groups.

Councillor Thomas Marino expressed disbelief at the call for what he believed to be an unnecessary general election. He set out how the opposition wanted to cause weeks of parliamentary shutdown at the beginning of a difficult winter in a cost of living crisis, costing hundreds of thousands of pounds in expenses and officers time.

Councillor Graham Bridgman referred to the cost of living report mentioned earlier in the meeting considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board and encouraged Members to read it and watch the recorded debate. He invited Members to recall that the Covid 19 emergency had shown how communities engaged with issues that affected all residents, and he encouraged them to help their residents by signposting to applicable benefits or the Hub system. Councillor Bridgman also applauded the partnership to match fund between the Council and the Greenham Trust.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter expressed his disappointment that the opposition appeared to not support the Motion because of the Conservative government. He noted that central government had its responsibilities but local authorities had the responsibility to deliver funding and schemes to local residents to help resolve difficulties. He referred to the global crisis and worldwide energy prices reaching shocking levels, and the subsequent impact on the most vulnerable in our communities which the Administration was addressing. Councillor Ardagh-Walter highlighted that some of the biggest profits being made currently were by green energy providers but that the focus needed to be on helping our residents with the tools available to the Council which the Motion supported.

In summing up, Councillor Doherty acknowledged that the debate had moved away from the Motion and on to national politics, but that the Prime Minister was the leader of the country and it was a Conservative government taking decisions whether the opposition approved or not. She thought it worthwhile to recognise that the energy price guarantee

would save the typical household around £1k which would make a huge difference to residents no longer facing uncapped energy prices. Councillor Doherty called on those that cared about how best to support the cost of living crisis in West Berkshire to support the Motion rather than play politics with it.

The Motion was put to the vote and duly **RESOLVED**.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda Item 18(e) refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Erik Pattenden regarding declaring a cost of living emergency, a minor alteration to which had been circulated to all Members prior to the meeting.

ALTERED MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery:

"Council notes that:

- There has been an unprecedented increase in the cost of living, which is having a significant impact on working people, pensioners, and those on benefits.
- This is in part caused by the rise in the Ofgem energy price cap, food and petrol/diesel price increases, rising inflation and wage growth stagnation.
- The ONS report three in four adults feel very or somewhat worried about the rising costs of living
- According to a report by the Resolution Foundation, people are facing the worst fall in living standards since the 1970s.
- According to data from the ONS, a typical household will have to spend an extra £1,287 due to rising cost of essentials and tax in 2022/23, but in West Berkshire, the average household energy rise will be £2,251.28.
- In 2021/22 the West Berks Foodbank distributed 10,033 seven-day food parcels to local people in crisis.
- Between 2018 and 2021 there has been a four-fold increase in the distribution of food parcels from West Berks Foodbank to over 8600 in 2019-20 and 2020-21 (projected to be even higher this year)
- In addition, West Berks Foodbank supports other local charities with1 tonne of food and essential items per month.

Despite the support the Council, central government and local organisations have been able to provide, it's clear that residents are experiencing serious financial challenges due to the rising cost of living, which are set to worsen, impacting directly on their financial and mental wellbeing.

Consequently, Council resolves to:

- Declare a 'Cost of Living Emergency' in West Berkshire.
- Ask the Executive to create a West Berkshire Financial Assistance Scheme and commit £300K to issue as additional food and fuel vouchers to approximately 4,000 residents on the lowest incomes.
- Ask the Executive to host a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit, with stakeholders, including local Town and Parish Councils, Citizens Advice, West Berks Food Bank, Local Trades Unions, and Chambers of Commerce and organisations working to support residents facing hardship.
- Call on the Government to act immediately to tackle the cost of living crisis by cutting the standard rate of VAT to 17.5%, restoring the Universal Credit supplement of £20, expanding the Warm Home Discount and introducing a home insulation fund to cut heating bills and carbon emissions".

Councillor Brooks referred to the extraordinary action called for by Councillor Oloko and invited Council to declare a cost of living emergency. He suggested the Executive be asked to create a West Berkshire Financial Assistance Scheme and commit £300k to issue as additional food and fuel vouchers to help approximately 4,000 residents on the lowest incomes. He asked for a local cost of living emergency summit to be held with stakeholders and for the government to be called upon to provide additional support by reducing VAT. He referred to the unprecedented increase in the cost of living and the impact it was having on working people. He believed this Motion would make a difference and provide help unlike the previous Motion. He noted that people with mortgages were facing 10% interest rates which could lead to negative equity and people giving up their houses. He reiterated that the context of the crisis was beyond control and due to economic problems caused by Covid-19 and the invasion of Ukraine, but argued that this Council could take action by providing practical help along with the voluntary sector and other stakeholders following an emergency summit. Councillor Brooks urged Members to vote for the Motion and take action, not to just applaud decisions taken in Westminster.

Councillor Lynne Doherty advised that she would not be supporting the Motion. She did not believe that creating a title of 'Cost of Living Emergency' was an effective action nor made any difference to residents. She also highlighted that nearly £700k had been put into the Household Support Grant, double the amount called for in the Motion. Councillor Doherty referred to comments made earlier in the meeting regarding the committee system and advised that the Local Government Association did not support this decision-making model. In her opinion the committee system was cumbersome and slow to take decisions and she believed the emergency summit proposed in the Motion would be the same. She also noted that the Chief Executive was already liaising with local providers, and meetings with the voluntary sector had been scheduled. Councillor Doherty then referred to the final resolution in the Motion and stated that Universal Credit was an exemplary system supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. A recent report she had read had set out how Universal Credit helped people in to employment and that it could, if used properly, be a positive factor for growth. She did not believe, therefore, that a simple addition of £20 for all was effective. Councillor Doherty concluded by outlining other actions taken by the Administration to support the elderly and to provide vouchers to those most in need over the coming months.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam agreed with the sentiment that these were extraordinary times and urged Members to focus on what more could be done now to help address the issues being faced by residents. He emphasised that it was a cost of living emergency and to declare it as such made clear the intent of the Council. He confirmed that the £300k referred to in the Motion would be focussed on and dedicated to assisting those in extreme poverty and deprivation.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the proposal within the Motion to call on the government to cut the standard rate of VAT, and queried whether the opposition were aware that it would cost around £19b a year to do so. He noted that he supported a VAT cut in the context of an overall responsible budget but argued that the Motion was calling for action without the thought of consequences.

Councillor Adrian Abbs highlighted that the Motion called for an extra £300k which would be in addition to the ongoing work mentioned by Councillor Doherty earlier in the debate. He stated that he had found it difficult to follow Conservative thinking when responding to the Covid-19 emergency because the position taken was of having no control, whereas he believed that choices were made not to do things at the right time and so the problem was made worse. He felt this also applied now to the energy crisis due to previous incorrect decisions. He noted that ideally the recommendations in this Motion could have been proposed during debate as an amendment to Councillor's Doherty's Motion, but

that procedural rules had not allowed for that if this Motion was to be discussed separately. He then mentioned the unacceptable length of time it was taking on average for a Motion proposed at Council to be dealt with following referral to another Committee for consideration.

Councillor Martha Vickers argued that Universal Credit was only a good system when adequately funded, and noted that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as well as Citizens Advice had lobbied for it to keep pace with inflation.

Councillor Biyi Oloko stated his opinion that the Motion was an example of extraordinary inertia rather than action.

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter argued that hindsight made for good decisions but being a government minister was an extraordinarily difficult job and mistakes did happen. He highlighted what he believed to be poor examples of Liberal Democrat decision-making and argued the futility of second guessing previous decisions.

Councillor Steve Masters believed that a cost of living emergency should be declared, and noted the support expressed from all parties to help those most in need. He expressed disappointment that this Motion from the Liberal Democrats had not been added to the Motion from the Conservatives as an amendment, and suggested that a consensus might have been achieved had the figures revealed tonight by the Administration been made available earlier. He also supported the notion of having Members and local agencies meet in a summit to obtain agreement and make progress, especially given the conversations already taking place between these groups. Councillor Masters referred to his meeting at St. Johns with the church and voluntary groups regarding the provision of assistance to vulnerable people, and he thanked those that had attended and contributed. He concluded by stating that agreement on this matter could have been achieved more co-operatively and with less recrimination.

Councillor Graham Bridgman reflected on the four elements of the proposal. He did not believe that the cost of living was a crisis affecting all residents in the district, but noted that there were pockets of deprivation within West Berkshire. He agreed with the comments made earlier in the debate by Councillor Doherty concerning the proposal to commit £300k to additional food and fuel vouchers for approximately 4000 residents, as that was already happening and with more money being spent. He reiterated that Members should signpost residents to the aid available, and was uncertain that a summit would achieve the same level of engagement already obtained through the Health and Wellbeing Board. Councillor Bridgman also fundamentally opposed the proposal contained within the final bullet point of the Motion regarding VAT and could not therefore support it.

Councillor Owen Jeffery believed this matter could have been a joint proposal supported by all Members if there had been an ability to have cross party discussion beforehand. He felt, however, that this was something rarely offered by the Administration. He argued that this had been a missed opportunity to work publicly together for the entire community of West Berkshire.

In summing up, Councillor Brooks went further and suggested that the Administration never offered the opportunity for Members to work together. He commented on the fact that this Motion could have been put forward as an amendment to the Conservative Motion prior to the meeting, but that the Administration would have refused it. He argued that declaring it as an emergency, just as with the climate emergency, was a positive action because it attracted focus and attention and became important. Councillor Brooks was uncertain why decision-making models had been introduced to the debate, but noted that the executive system gave power to a small number of Councillors with the

remaining backbenchers having little involvement. He felt that the committee system would encourage candidates to stand for election as it allowed all Councillors to be engaged in the democratic process. He reiterated that the £300k proposed in the Motion was additional funding, and that it was dismissive to object to hosting a summit just because meetings with external groups were already taking place. He also thought it inappropriate of the Administration to dismiss a VAT cut given the tax initiatives mentioned by the Prime Minister during her election campaign. Councillor Brooks believed that the Administration automatically opposed any proposals put forward by the opposition but that his party would continue to suggest good ideas.

The Motion was put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda Item 18(d) refers) submitted in the name of Councillor Ross Mackinnon relating to the Rural Economy Conference.

The Chairman advised that Council would not debate the Motion and, in accordance with Rule 4.9.8, this would be referred to the Executive for consideration as the detail of the Motion falls within its remit.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Hilary Cole:

"This council welcomes the recently published research paper by the Royal Town Planning Institute on 'Rural Planning in the 2020s'. Our Council recognises that a thriving rural economy is essential to our prosperity and well-being. It is of vital importance and in the interests of all our residents to protect and develop our rural economy, and to encourage and enable rural businesses to start-up, develop, adapt and diversify.

We recognise the importance of the principle of sustainable development, and its three overarching objectives: economic, social and environmental. The principle of sustainable development is an important part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and our own local planning policies here in West Berkshire.

The NPPF itself states in section 2, paragraph 9, that "Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area."

One such significant aspect of the character of West Berkshire is its largely rural setting. Outside of the main towns and rural service centres, the only practicable means of travelling to and from many homes and businesses in these areas is by private car. As an authority we will always seek to promote active travel and rural public transport initiatives as sustainable options to access new businesses in our beautiful countryside, however we accept that this is not going to be practical in all instances.

The environmental objective of sustainable development includes moving to a low carbon economy. The significant and continuing reduction in carbon emissions from petrol car engines, and the increasing take-up of electric vehicles, means that private car use is not incompatible in the long-term with the movement to a low carbon economy.

This council therefore urges that a site should not be considered to be in an unsustainable location by being only accessible practicably by private car. Assessment of sustainability should give particular consideration to the need to secure a diverse and adaptive rural economy balanced against wider social and environmental factors.

We therefore resolve to ask that the Executive hold a Rural Economy Conference in November, which will bring together rural businesses, senior Council officers and other interested parties, to consider how this Council can help our rural businesses overcome the challenges and barriers they face to encourage them to develop, diversify, adapt and thrive".

Councillors Tony Vickers and Carolyne Culver raised a point of information regarding the invitation already received by them to a Rural Business Forum on 4 November 2022. As the next Executive meeting was due to be held on 3 November, they queried the timing of referring this matter to the Executive. Councillor Mackinnon clarified that the Executive could determine to hold a Forum outside of one of its formal meetings.

Councillor Graham Bridgman raised a point of order regarding the decision to refer this Motion to Executive as it was his understanding that planning policy CS10 was a matter for Council determination. The Chairman advised that the Motion would still be referred to the Executive as per the advice of the Monitoring Officer given that it requested the Executive to take action on the matter.

The Chairman advised that, following extensive consultation with the Monitoring Officer, he had taken the decision to withdraw Motion F from the agenda under Rule 4.9.5 as the wording of the proposed resolution referred to Executive powers. In his view it would also be impossible to debate the Motion in any forum without discussing the merits of the current judicial review, meaning Council could therefore not have a meaningful debate.

Councillor Graham Bridgman proposed that the meeting be extended until 10.30pm. This was seconded by the Chairman and duly approved by Council.

57. Members' Questions

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

(a) A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver on the subject of the Council's work with local landowners to create offsetting projects for carbon, biodiversity and nutrient neutrality was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation.
(b) A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of the Council's current and proposed draft policies regarding Shale gas extraction in West Berkshire was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transformation.
(c) A question standing in the name of Councillor Carolyne Culver on the subject of the impact of recent government planning policy announcements on the evolving draft Local Plan was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside.
(d) A question standing in the name of Councillor Steve Masters to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development was withdrawn at the meeting.

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 9.50 pm)

CHAIRMAN .....

Date of Signature .....