

# Notice of Meeting

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# Executive

**Thursday 21st September 2023 at 5.00 pm**

**in the Council Chamber, Council Offices,  
Market Street, Newbury**

**Note:** This meeting can be streamed live here: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/executivelive>

Date of despatch of Agenda: Wednesday, 13 September 2023

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) on 01635 519052 e-mail: [sadie.owen1@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:sadie.owen1@westberks.gov.uk)

Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk)



## Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday, 21 September 2023 (continued)

<b>To:</b>	Councillors Lee Dillon (Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Jeff Brooks, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Iain Cottingham, Denise Gaines, Janine Lewis, Alan Macro and Tony Vickers
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# Agenda

## Part I

	<b>Pages</b>
1. <b>Apologies for Absence</b> To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	5 - 6
2. <b>Minutes</b> To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 6 July 2023.	7 - 12
3. <b>Declarations of Interest</b> To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any personal, disclosable pecuniary or other registrable interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' <a href="#">Code of Conduct</a> .	13 - 14
4. <b>Public Questions</b> Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.	15 - 18
5. <b>Petitions</b> Councillors or Members of the public may present any petition which they have received. These will normally be referred to the appropriate Committee without discussion.	19 - 20

## Items as timetabled in the Forward Plan

	<b>Pages</b>
6. <b>Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One (EX4361)</b> Purpose: the capital financing performance report provided to Members reports on the under or over spends against the Council's approved capital programme and associated capital financing implications. This report presents the provisional outturn position for financial year 2023/24 as forecast at quarter one, and future borrowing requirement for financial year 2024/25 which is funded from the Council's revenue budget.	21 - 40



**Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday, 21 September 2023 (continued)**

7. **2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One (EX4360)** 41 - 68  
Purpose: to report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. The report is Quarter One for the 2023/24 financial year and highlights the financial position at each quarter of the financial year and impact on the Council's General Fund position. This allows the Executive to consider the implications and the actions being taken to mitigate and manage the position.
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8. **Corporate Transformation Programme 2023-25 (EX4448)** 69 - 78  
Purpose: the Council established a new Service Director- Transformation post to lead on developing a new Corporate Transformation Programme for the Council in March 2023. The purpose of this paper is to give details of the projects to be included within this Programme over the coming two years, which will be a key workstream in the Council's efforts to ensure it delivers sustainable, efficient and customer focussed public services.
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9. **Results of Public Consultation - Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park (EX4434)** 79 - 118  
Purpose: to report on the results of the public consultation in relation to the potential creation of a grass sports pitch at Manor Park, and to determine whether the proposed sports pitch should be progressed for a planning application.  
  
To set out the potential implications of not developing the sports pitch at this location within the context of the Newbury Sports Hub and Playing Pitch Strategy.
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10. **Community Forums (EX4427)** 119 - 158  
Purpose: the Council is committed to proactively engaging with the communities that we serve to ensure the best outcomes for all. The Council therefore intends to establish Community Forums, where residents and others will be invited to participate in discussions with Members and senior officers at in-person meetings.  
  
The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity has indicated that meetings of the Environment Advisory Group be more open. The report sets out proposals for an Environment Action Group (EAG) Open Forum that seek to facilitate this proposal.  
  
The report sets out the considerations that will be relevant to the operation of Community Forums, and seeks views regarding the same. The potential resource implications are also highlighted.
- 
11. **Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey (EX4378)** 159 - 192  
Purpose: to provide a response to the recommendations made in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) Task and Finish Group on the Customer Journey, which was presented to



## Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday, 21 September 2023 (continued)

Members of the OSMC in March 2023.

12. **Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges (EX4379)** 193 - 208  
Purpose: to provide a response to the recommendations made in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) Task and Finish Group on Fees and Charges, which was presented to Members of the OSMC in March 2023.
13. **Amendments to Public Protection Partnership's Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) (EX4415)** 209 - 214  
Purpose: to request that the Executive delegates authority to the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, to amend the IAA to reflect the changes to the constitution in respect of the Joint Public Protection Committee approved by Council on 20 July 2023.
14. **Members' Questions** 215 - 218  
Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by Councillors in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

Sarah Clarke  
Service Director: Strategy and Governance

### West Berkshire Council Strategy Priorities

#### Council Strategy Priorities:

**PC1: Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes**

**PC2: Support everyone to reach their full potential**

**OFB1: Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire**

**GP1: Develop local infrastructure to support and grow the local economy**

**GP2: Maintain a green district**

**SIT1: Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships**

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Sadie Owen on telephone (01635) 519052.



West Berkshire  
C O U N C I L

Executive – 21 September 2023

## **Item 1 – Apologies for absence**

Verbal Item

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## DRAFT

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

### EXECUTIVE

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 6 JULY 2023

**Councillors Present:** Lee Dillon (Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Jeff Brooks, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Iain Cottingham, Janine Lewis and Tony Vickers

**Also Present:** Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Howard Woollaston, David Marsh and Carlyne Culver,

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Denise Gaines, Councillor Alan Macro and Joseph Holmes

**Officers Present:** Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Chief Financial Accountant), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Lizzie Reeves (Project Manager - MC, OS), Michelle Sancho (Acting Head of Education Services), and Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal & Democratic)

### PART I

#### 1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Denise Gaines and Alan Macro, and from Richard Somner and Jo Stewart.

#### 2. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

#### 3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 4. **Public Questions**

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

#### 5. **Petitions**

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

#### 6. **Petition response - Charging (EX4328)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 6), which provided a response to a petition presented to Council on 1 December 2022 requesting that 'WBC ensure that it charges the correct amounts of money due to it for any and all services for which it levies charges and will reimburse any resident or service user who has been charged in error or has been charged where no charge should have been levied.'

Councillor Brooks apologised to the petitioner for the length of time it had taken to provide a response and commented that the constitution would be amended to include a four month timeframe for responding to petitions.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried how recommendation 2.3 within the report differed from the practice of the previous administration. Councillor Brooks acknowledged that he

## EXECUTIVE - 6 JULY 2023 - MINUTES

had not looked but was content with the statement as to how the current administration would act.

Councillor Iain Cottingham seconded the recommendations within the report.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Note the petition and resolve to continue to ensure that the Council complies with the intent of its policy framework in income collection.
- Aims for the Council to provide the best possible customer experience, and recently published its Customer Charter, which details the service levels it aspires to provide. It also explains what recourse is available to individuals or businesses who feel these have not been met. This would include those individuals or businesses who believe that they have been charged incorrectly or have been charged where no charge should have been levied. It is not the Council's intention, nor will it be policy, to issue and collect charges that are incorrect or are not chargeable if appropriate procedures and form completion have been properly undertaken.

### 7. **Save the ReadiBus Petition (EX4340)**

Councillor Lee Dillon introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 7), which provided a response to a petition presented to Council on 12 January 2023 requesting that the Council 'review their decision on funding the ReadiBus service; making sure that this important community service remains available for those who need it, when they need it, for the long term'.

Councillor Dominic Boeck suggested that a confidentiality clause was standard in contract templates and acted to safeguard both parties. Councillor Dillon responded that it was no longer a standard clause given the recommendation within the report, but acknowledged that there may be a need to include such a clause in the case of a commercial contract.

In response to a query from Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Councillor Dillon confirmed that the clause would also be removed from the thirteen other community transport operator contracts within West Berkshire.

Councillor David Marsh commented that he strongly supported the recommendations within the report and the previous report.

Councillor Martin Colston seconded the recommendations within the report.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Note the request detailed within the petition, and approve the removal of the confidentiality clause from the service level agreement (SLA) with community transport operators.

### 8. **Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Report 2022 (EX4405)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which demonstrated the childcare sufficiency within West Berkshire.

Councillor Dominic Boeck thanked Councillor Codling for presenting the report and commended the work of officers in the early years setting, particularly during the challenging time during the Covid pandemic.

Councillor Carlyne Culver noted that the report would be useful evidence for the Scrutiny Commission due to the forthcoming requirement from September 2026 to review wraparound care.



## EXECUTIVE - 6 JULY 2023 - MINUTES

Councillor Culver noted that page 44 of the Agenda pack referred to Victoria Ward which did not exist in West Berkshire, and further listed West Ilsley rather than Ridgeway as part of the Downlands Ward. It was agreed that the relevant amendments would be made to the report.

Councillor David Marsh queried whether there were any steps that the Council could take to encourage and attract more staff to the sector. Councillor Codling responded that she would be working with officers to address the issue.

Councillor Adrian Abbs seconded the recommendations within the report.

### **Resolved that:**

- The Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022 was reviewed by the Executive Committee to inform elected members on how we are meeting our duty to secure sufficient childcare.
- Executive recommend the report is actively promoted on the Council's websites to make it accessible to parents/carers and other interested parties.

### **9. Contracts for Award under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4407)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), that provided details of forthcoming supply, service and works contract awards that would have a contract value in excess of £2.5m and as such would require approval from the Executive during the next quarter. Councillor Brooks noted that the Berkshire Community Equipment Service was a particularly large contract as it covered the whole of Berkshire.

Councillor Adrian Abbs noted the two environmental contracts which would provide further electric vehicle charging points within Council car parks, and rooftop solar panels on Council buildings.

Councillor Heather Codling highlighted the Kennet Valley Expansion Project which would provide an additional twelve spaces for Primary aged SEMH/ASD pupils.

In response to a query from Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Abbs confirmed that the Electric Vehicle charging points would be within dedicated bays for electric vehicles.

### **Recommendation** (Vote to be taken in Part II):

- Executive to delegate authority to an individual (Service Director, Head of Service or Executive Director) to proceed with the award of the contracts in table [4.11] in consultation with the portfolio holder following the completion of the appropriate tender process and Procurement Board approval of a Contract Award report.

### **10. Call-In of Executive Decision EX4332: Newbury Sports Hub - revised costs and seeking permission to sign Development Management Agreement (EX4332)**

Councillor Janine Lewis introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), relating to a Call-In of a previous Executive Decision concerning Newbury Sports Hub.

Councillor Carlyne Culver as Chair of Scrutiny Commission commented that neither herself nor Councillor Lewis had seen the report prior to its publication. Councillor Culver stated that her comments should in no way be seen as a criticism of the author of the paper, but noted that the recommendation that the Council undertake a new value for money review had not been agreed by Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 20 June 2023. Councillor Culver suggested that the report implied that Scrutiny Commission

## EXECUTIVE - 6 JULY 2023 - MINUTES

agreed that the Sports Hub project should proceed, whereas minutes from the meeting reflected that no value for money review had been agreed.

Councillor Culver further noted that the 'Implications and Impact Assessment' section of the report did not reflect the comments made at Scrutiny Commission. Councillor Culver requested that Executive take note of the Scrutiny Commission's recommendations when making any future decision on the project. Councillor Lee Dillon agreed that due attention would be paid to the Scrutiny Commission's proposals.

Councillor Howard Woollaston suggested that Newbury Football Club would now have at least three to four years without a viable pitch to play on, when they could have had a pitch the following year had the project proceeded.

Councillor David Marsh suggested that the statement within the 'Property implication' section of the report that 'An alternative option would involve construction of a facility on an alternative site, which has not yet been identified' was incorrect as the Executive had identified an alternative site.

Councillor Dillon explained that the report was part of due process and that a report outlining the Executive's fully phased plan for the Faraday Road site would be returning to a future Executive meeting.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed doubt that a better facility than that proposed at the Sports Hub could be provided at Faraday Road.

**Resolved that:** Executive

Reconsiders its original decision of 23 March 2023 in respect of 'Newbury Sports Hub - revised costs and seeking permission to sign Development Management Agreement (EX4332)', with particular consideration given to the following aspects:

- costs incurred;
- the Council should conduct a new value for money review taking into account:
  - business plan based on increased costs;
  - penalty fees associated with not proceeding with the original scheme as planned;
  - any implications for the new Leisure Contract; and
  - the need to revisit the Playing Pitch Strategy should the Sports Hub not be progressed.

### 11. Members' Questions

Councillor Lee Dillon clarified that the Executive were members of the Liberal Democrats and not the Liberal party, and consequently any questions referring to Liberal policy in the future would not be answered.

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

### 12. Exclusion of Press and Public

**RESOLVED that:** members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006. Rule 8.10.4 of the Constitution also refers.

### 13. Contracts for Award under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4407)

(Paragraph 6 - information relating to proposed action to be taken by the Local Authority)

**EXECUTIVE - 6 JULY 2023 - MINUTES**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 12), concerning details of forthcoming supply, service and works contract awards that would have a contract value in excess of £2.5m and as such would require approval from the Executive during the next quarter.

**RESOLVED that:** the recommendations in the exempt report be agreed.

**Other options considered:** the approval of a consolidated contract award report is considered the most efficient way of meeting the governance requirements of the Constitution, therefore no alternative proposals are being made.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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

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Executive – 21 September 2023

## **Item 3 – Declarations of Interest**

Verbal Item

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## Item 4:

### **Public Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 September 2023.**

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

**A. Question submitted by Ian Hall to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation:**

*"When the petition on charging was presented a number of signatures were moved as being non-local. Why was a complaint allowed against councillors when it too came from outside the area?"*

**B. Question submitted by John Gotelee to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development:**

*"7.24. Avison Young Environmental study for the LRIE states:Pre-application consultation undertaken with WBDC as part of this study confirms that a surface water drainage strategy for the Site should be designed to accommodate the 1% annual probability storm event plus a 40% allowance for climate change. Where can one see this Surface water Drainage Strategy? Has one even been completed?"*

**C. Question submitted by Anna Karim to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity:**

*"I would like to ask if the Council will consider the impact of refusing renewable energy projects or refusing planning on improved buildings with better insulation on Global temperatures.*

*Background: West Berkshire Council declared a Climate Emergency on the 2nd July 2019.The planning department has recently refused renewable energy applications and applications that upgrade old uninsulated buildings (with fossil fuel heating systems) that would have significantly reduced residents' carbon emissions.I am petitioning the council to add a climate consultation step to the planning process. I would ask that the Council's Environmental Specialist or a member of the Planning department review all applications which are going to be refused to see if the application can be made acceptable to be passed on the grounds that the application has significant climate change mitigation impact.*

*Why now? We have seen significant flooding in the Pang Valley and forest fires in Sulham and Tidmarsh woods. Our farmers are having to deal with alternating periods of heavy rain and extreme drought and this is in the UK which is less affected than Southern and Central Europe."*

**D. Question submitted by Graham Storey to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel:**

*"Will the council change current policy, and invest directly in newsocial housing for West Berkshire rather than relying on contributions from private developers?"*

## Item 4:

### **Public Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 September 2023.**

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

**E. Question submitted by Anthony Pick to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"Why have no decisions yet been made by the Council's Head of Planning on the recommendations to locally list eight heritage assets made by the West Berkshire Heritage Forum at its Selection Panel meeting on 27th October 2022, in accordance with the local listing process approved by Full Council on 27th September 2012 and jointly signed by the Council and the West Berkshire Heritage Forum on 26th October 2012; when will those decisions be made and when will entries for those listings which are approved be made on the Council's web site?"*

**F. Question submitted by Paula Saunderson to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"For completeness of records please may I ask this Question which appeared as a Supplementary Question from me to question H in the Public Questions answered in the Executive Minutes of the Meeting held on the 9th February 2023, and to which I have not had a reply. "I'm glad to hear that the London Road Industrial Estate is in the Local Plan review despite page 84, paragraph 7.10 indicating that it isn't. In that respect it will need to comply with the NPPF, Chapter 14, paragraph 160. Your strategic flood risk assessment level one, addendum one, and your strategic flood risk assessment level two, site specific analysis for new one (NEW 1) which indicates that you must prepare a holistic flood risk assessment for the whole of the area within the red line and a drainage and waste water management plan. That's also indicated in the other policies. How are you going to do that please?" The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered: I'll refer to Officers and come back to you in writing."*

**G. Question submitted by Paul Morgan to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:**

*"At the Executive Meeting on 6 July 2023 the leader of the Opposition claimed in his question that "The Council has announced that it will not commercially develop the former pitch at Faraday Road and instead use it for football matches, despite a superb alternative facility being shortly available at the Sports Hub. Can the council please confirm (or refute) Councillor MacKinnon's statement that an "alternative facility will shortly be available at Newbury Rugby Club"?"*

**H. Question submitted by Alan Pearce to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"A new car park at the back of the Cinch storage unit on the London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) has been completed on the 25th of July 2023. Please would the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement confirm if any of the additional Urban runoff is leaving the site underground via*



## Item 4:

### Public Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 September 2023.

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

*a Sewer that is connected to the main Thames Water Surface Water Sewer that services the LRIE?"*

I. **Question submitted by Tom Marino to the Leader of the Council:**

*"Is it acceptable for Councillors to publicly mock people who do not speak or pronounce English words correctly, particularly when English is not their first language?"*

J. **Question submitted by Ian Hall to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation:**

*"Is it right that complaints from people outside the area (and with no connection to our area) are allowed, and should the system be amended to prevent this type of incident?"*

K. **Question submitted by John Gotelee to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development:**

*"Avison Young Environmental study section 7.24 also states: WBDC has also commented that "infiltration Sustainable Drainage Systems and below ground attenuation storage will not be acceptable" and that "significant space will be needed for at-ground level Sustainable Drainage Systems. Could the Executive please explain the apparent incongruence of small SUDs under the road that we are told are planned by Ardent."*

L. **Question submitted by Anthony Pick to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"Why has no response yet been given by the Planning Service to the update to the Historic Environment Action Plan prepared by the West Berkshire Heritage Forum and submitted with a request for advice on the planning section in April 2022; when will that response be forthcoming, so that the revised document can be issued for consultation to Heritage Forum members?"*

M. **Question submitted by Paul Morgan to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development:**

*"In late July 2023, the Newbury Weekly news reported that "West Berkshire Council wants to spend £5.3m to remodel Newbury Wharf". Can the Council please confirm if there is any substance in this report and if yes, who is behind this idea (i.e., is it an old Conservative administration proposal; is it a new Liberal Democrats administration proposal, is it being driven by officers or members etc.) Thank you"*

N. **Question submitted by Alan Pearce to the Leader of the Council:**

*"In an email from the Leader of the Council to me on the 9th of August 2023 on the overall long-term approach of the London Road Industrial Estate it was stated "Officers and members will meet but not with legal representatives" was*

## Item 4:

### Public Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 September 2023.

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

*this decision made by the Leader or by which officer and what was the reason for the decision?"*

- O. **Question submitted by John Gotelee to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement/Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countyside:**

*"Having opposed the Conservatives plans for a sports hub at Monks Lane isn't the refusal to quash the planning application a case of political hypocrisy?"*

- P. **Question submitted by Anthony Pick to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"In view of the recent applications to redevelop the Kennet Centre, and the new applications from the developers, what actions are the council taking to make sure that the Newbury Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal (draft dated December 2021) is in place before a decision is taken on these plans?"*

- Q. **Question submitted by Alan Pearce to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development:**

*"Please will the portfolio holder for Regeneration, Growth and Strategy Development answer my supplementary question from the 6th July 2023 Executive meeting, Public Question (G) "going from your previous answer it looks to me as if you think you can develop the London Road Industrial Estate (LRIE) purely on the free hold land that the Council owns, and meet drainage law, have you done any risk assessment of the risk of legal challenges on any planning permission on the LRIE that could hold it up because you can't meet drainage law without third-party land downstream"?"*

- R. **Question submitted by Anthony Pick to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"Given that west Berkshire has 53 Conservation Areas, of which only two have approved Conservation Area Appraisals; given the central role of such Appraisals in defining the heritage character of each Conservation Area; given that over half the 53 Conservation Areas were approved in 1970-73; and given the promises made in successive approved Local Plans that such Appraisals would be produced, so far with minimal result, when will the Council at last take this task seriously, as required by the National Planning Policy Framework, and put actions in place to develop those Appraisals, a task in which the West Berkshire Heritage Forum would be glad to assist where possible?"*

Executive – 21 September 2023

## **Item 5 – Petitions**

Verbal Item

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# Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Iain Cottingham
<b>Date Portfolio Member sent to/agreed report:</b>	10 August 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Shannon Coleman-Slaughter
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4361

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

The capital financing performance report provided to Members reports on the under or over spends against the Council's approved capital programme and associated capital financing implications. This report presents the provisional outturn position for financial year 2023/24 as forecast at quarter one, and future borrowing requirement for financial year 2024/25 which is funded from the Council's revenue budget.

## 2 Recommendations

### 2.1 Members are asked:

- (a) To note the quarter one underspend position of £15.1 million and reprofiling proposals of £14.1 million. Reprofiling proposals are included in appendix D.
- (b) To note the budget changes included in the quarter one position detailed in appendix A, and proposed external funding changes in appendix B. The proposed external funding changes result in a net increase in expenditure budgets of £1.9 million and a reduction in the Council funded element of the programme of £4.4 million.

### 2.2 Members are asked to approve the following recommendations:

- (a) A new Council funded project for the procurement of a new Adult Social Care client management system (£224k) is added to the 2023/24 capital programme (appendix C). The current contract is due for retender and procurement activity is due to commence in the current financial year with full implementation of a software solution in financial year 2025/26.
- (b) A new Council funded project for installation of CCTV cameras at Market Street (£18k) to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme, as per Appendix C. This is to provide coverage of external areas not presently benefiting from CCTV, in

response to an upward trend in theft of bicycles and vandalism to the plant room fencing and nearby street lighting.

- (c) A new Council funded project to acquire polling booths to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme (£40.5k), as per Appendix C. This is to replace existing equipment in poor condition, and which will then incorporate an accessible level for ease of use by disabled voters.
- (d) A new Council funded project to acquire accounting software to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme (£22.5k), as per Appendix C. This is required to support mandatory compliance with accounting requirements on adoption of the International Financial Reporting Standard 16 on lease accounting (IFRS16). Fees for future years licence costs will be included as part of the 2024/25 capital build process.

### 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

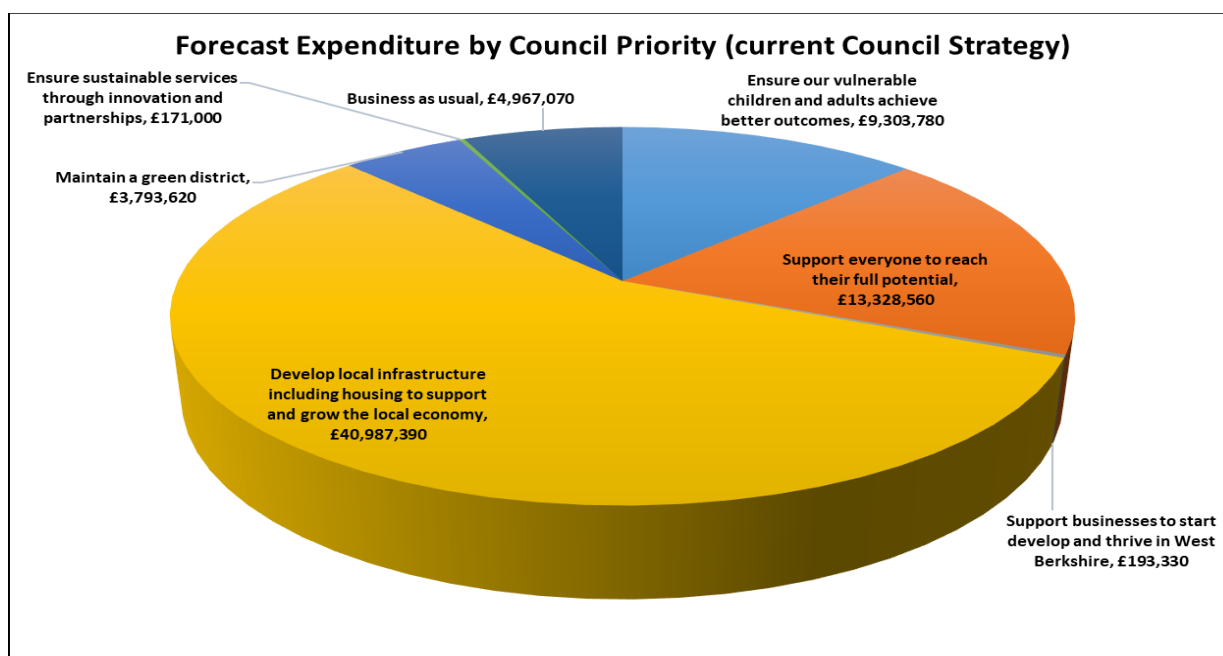
Implication	Commentary
<p><b>Financial:</b></p>	<p>The forecast outturn position is expenditure of £72.7 million against a planned programme budget of £87.8 million, an overall forecast underspend of £15.1 million. £14.1 million of future expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into financial year 2024/25.</p> <p>PWLB rates remain in excess of 5% compared to a recent historic borrowing average of 2 - 3%. In a rising interest environment, the Council will face risks of increased cost on any new external borrowing undertaken. The Council has sought to mitigate risk and keep interest costs low through a strategy of internal borrowing (utilisation of own resources and short term borrowing). The Investment and Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2023/24 which supports delivery of the capital programme has been set with the same underlying principles.</p>
<p><b>Human Resource:</b></p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p>	<p>The Prudential Code requires authorities to look at capital and investment plans in light of overall organisation strategy and resources to ensure that decisions are made with sufficient regard to the long term financing implications and risks to the Council. To demonstrate that local authorities have fulfilled these objectives, the code sets out a number of indicators, although the Code does not include suggested indicative limits or ratios. Local Authorities are to set their own limits and ratios, subject to controls under section 4 of the Local Government</p>

	Act 2003. The Council's capital programme is a key driver of the treasury management activity.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	The Council is also exposed to inflationary cost pressures across the capital programme as a whole. Furthermore, any rise in PWLB borrowing rates resulting from recent increases in Bank rate will result in increased interest cost on any new borrowing undertaken. Both of these external risks are largely outside the Council's ability to control, although the Council will take appropriate advice from our external treasury consultants, to determine the optimum time and structure for any new borrowing to be undertaken.			
<b>Property:</b>	Not applicable			
<b>Policy:</b>	Not applicable			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		

<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Joseph Holmes – Executive Director for Resources and s151 Officer.  Capital Strategy Group (CSG).			

## 4 Executive Summary

4.1 The capital programme enables delivery of key Council schemes focused on supporting the approved Council Strategy. As at quarter one £72.7 million of expenditure has been forecast across capital schemes for financial year 2023/24.



4.2 As part of the forecast outturn position £14.1 million of future planned expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into financial year 2024/25, a detailed breakdown of which is included in Appendix D. This is comprised of £8.5 million of Council funded expenditure



(i.e. to be financed through external borrowing) and £5.6 million of externally funded expenditure.

- 4.3 In respect of financing the capital programme, as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, the Council's total level of long term borrowing to fund capital spend stood at £181.9 million.
- 4.4 With regard to the wider economic outlook, at the June meeting of its Monetary Policy Committee, the Bank of England (BoE) increased Bank Rate by 0.5% to 5%. This was the 13<sup>th</sup> consecutive rise in Bank Rate in response to high inflation. Recent economic instability has been reflected in significant increases to Local Government borrowing from the PWLB (Public Works and Loans Board), with rates for a 25 year annuity loan now on average at over 5% compared to a recent historic borrowing average of 2 - 3%. In a rising interest environment, the Council will face risks of increased cost on any new external borrowing undertaken to support delivery of planned capital works, in addition to general cost inflationary pressures as inflation remains high. The headline rate of Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation was 7.9% in the year to June 2023, and the rate of 'core inflation' (i.e. adjusted to exclude energy and food products) was 6.8%. Whilst lower than the position reported in May, the Bank of England is forecasting inflation will still be around 5% by the end of 2023. It currently sits at 6.8% ahead of our European<sup>1</sup> neighbours. Inflation is a "global phenomenon," due to high energy costs, shortage of goods and materials. Additionally UK's exit from the EU has been a factor in our higher rate. Low unemployment is driving inflation upwards, caused by older workers leaving the workforce during the pandemic and EU workers leaving the UK.
- 4.5 The capital programme approved by Council Committee in March 2023 was set with the expectation to undertake new external borrowing to support delivery. Currently the Council has sought to mitigate risk through a strategy of not undertaking long term borrowing in respect of PWLB financing and, instead focusing on supporting delivery of the capital programme through short term borrowing and cash balances. The strategy of keeping borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, has reduced risk and helps keep interest costs low. The Investment and Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2023/24 has been set with the same underlying principles.
- 4.6 Capital financing costs are incurred a year in arrears hence the cost of financing 2023/24 capital expenditure will fall into financial year 2024/25. Capital expenditure in the current financial year will result in an increased borrowing requirement of £37.8 million. This assumes a requirement to maintain minimum investment balances of £10 million.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

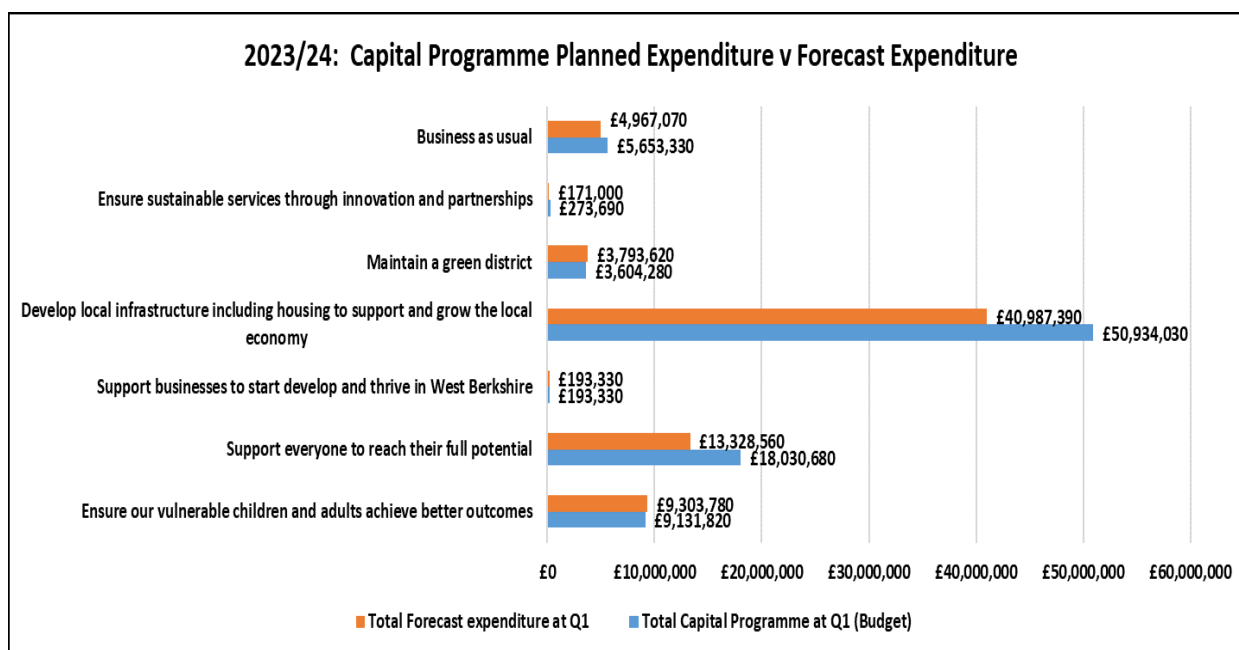
- 5.1 Capital expenditure and its supporting financing have financial consequences for the Council for many years into the future. Expenditure is therefore subject to both a national regulatory framework and to local policy framework.

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<sup>1</sup> 2.6% in Spain, 4.8% in France, Italy 5.3%, 5.8% in Ireland and 6.1% in Germany per July / August 2023

## Background

- 5.2 The 2023/24 capital programme was agreed by Council in March 2023 with a gross expenditure budget of £69.5 million split between externally funded expenditure of £38.8 million and £30.7 million of Council funded expenditure (i.e. application of capital receipts and external borrowing). The repayment of principal sums and interest on loans used to fund capital expenditure are met from the revenue budget for capital financing and risk management. Included within the capital programme for 2023/24 was £22.8 million of expenditure reprofiled from the 2022/23 approved capital programme, with an additional £16.4 million of expenditure subsequently reprofiled into 2023/24 at the end of 2022/23. During the financial year budget changes may occur, mainly as a result of budgets brought forward from prior financial years, additional grants, s106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocations received in year or expenditure re-profiled in future financial years. As part of the budget monitoring process, the forecast year end position of the capital projects is reviewed and proposals for unutilised budgets to be re-profiled is reviewed by CSG. As at quarter one the revised capital programme budget pre proposed expenditure reprofiling into financial year 2024/25 is £87.8 million. A detailed breakdown of budget changes is included in appendix A.
- 5.3 The capital programme is planned and mapped against the Council’s currently approved Council Strategy. At quarter one expenditure of £72.7 million has been forecast to be incurred against the revised capital programme of £87.8 million, generating a forecast underspend of £15.1 million.



- 5.4 Forecast expenditure indicates an overall programme delivery of 85%, with reprofiling proposals of £14.1 million (16.4% of the revised programme), a minor underspend (post reprofiling), is forecast of £1.0m (1.2%). From a directorate and service level perspective the forecast position is as follows:

## Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One

Directorate	Approved Programme (inc reprofiling from 2022/23)	Quarter One Budget	Quarter One Forecast Expenditure	Forecast (Under)/Overspend	Expenditure Reprofiling Requested	Revised Budget	Adjusted Outturn Position
People	£31,283,590	£33,004,480	£24,079,640	(£8,924,840)	£7,891,940	£25,112,540	(£1,032,900)
Place	£43,674,230	£43,949,230	£38,564,850	(£5,384,380)	£5,662,500	£38,286,730	£278,120
Resources	£10,867,450	£10,867,450	£10,100,260	(£767,190)	£498,540	£10,368,910	(£268,650)
Total Council	£85,825,270	£87,821,160	£72,744,750	(£15,076,410)	£14,052,980	£73,768,180	(£1,023,430)

### The People Directorate

5.5 The directorate is forecasting total expenditure of £24.0 million against a budget of £33.0 million, creating an underspend of £8.9 million at outturn. £7.9 million of future anticipated expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into financial year 2024/25 of which £2.5 million is funded externally and £5.4 million is proposed funding through Council borrowing.

People Directorate	Approved Programme (Including Reprofiling from 2022/23)	Quarter One Budget	Quarter One Forecast Expenditure	Forecast (Under)/Overspend	Expenditure Reprofiling Requested at Quarter One	Revised Budget post Requested Reprofiling	Forecast (Under)/Over spend adjusted for Re-Profiling
Adult Social Care	£5,117,630	£5,117,630	£4,284,630	(£833,000)	£	£5,117,630	(£833,000)
Childrens & Family Services	£30,000	£30,000	£	(£30,000)	£	£30,000	(£30,000)
Education	£14,224,770	£14,632,800	£12,080,820	(£2,551,980)	£2,481,320	£12,151,480	(£70,660)
Communities & Wellbeing	£11,911,190	£13,224,050	£7,714,190	(£5,509,860)	£5,410,620	£7,813,430	(£99,240)
Total Directorate	£31,283,590	£33,004,480	£24,079,640	(£8,924,840)	£7,891,940	£25,112,540	(£1,032,900)

5.6 In respect of Adult Social Care, the approved programme is forecast to be delivered with the exception of two projects: Modernising Adult Social Care (£83k) and Learning Disability Supported Living, Walnut Close Transformation (£750k). No reprofiling of expenditure into later financial years has been requested by the service in relation to these two projects.

5.7 Children & Family Services have in year provision of £30k budgeted for potential adaptations/building works to foster homes. This is a demand led budget and currently is forecast to not be spent in year, no reprofiling request has been made by the service.

5.8 Education services are forecasting variances across several schemes. This includes underspends on the remodelling of Calcot School (£1.1 million – due to delay in completion of initial feasibility study) and Brookfields Expansion (£0.6 million). The service has requested aggregate reprofiling adjustments at quarter one totalling £2.5 million, which includes changes in relation to these two continuing schemes.

5.9 Communities & Wellbeing have forecast a quarter one underspend of £5.5 million. The main underspends are on the Expansion of the Berkshire Records Office (£1.4 million, understood to be attributable to tendering delays) and the Newbury Sports Hub (£2.3 million due to project freeze). The service has requested budget for both schemes be reprofiled at this stage.

## The Place Directorate

5.10 The directorate is forecasting total expenditure of £38.6 million against a budget of £43.9 million, creating an underspend of £5.3 million. £5.6 million of future anticipated expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into financial year 2024/25 of which £3.0 million is externally funded and £2.6 million is proposed funding through Council borrowing. Post reprofiling the directorate will be forecasting an overspend position of £278k, however external funding adjustments are expected which will fund/remove the overspend position (appendix B).

Place Directorate	Approved Programme (inc reprofiling from 2022/23)	Q1 Budget	Q1 Forecast Expenditure	Forecast (Under)/Overspend	Expenditure Reprofiling Requested	Revised Budget	Forecast (Under)/Overspend adjusted for Re-Profitting
Development & Regulation	£13,893,310	£13,893,310	£10,090,770	(£3,802,540)	£2,572,940	£11,320,370	(£1,229,600)
Environment	£29,780,920	£30,055,920	£28,474,080	(£1,581,840)	£3,089,560	£26,966,360	£1,507,720
Directorate Totals	£43,674,230	£43,949,230	£38,564,850	(£5,384,380)	£5,662,500	£38,286,730	£278,120

5.11 In respect of the Development & Regulation Service, five projects are forecast to underspend, including three projects subject to reprofiling proposals: Four Houses Corner (£2.2 million), the joint venture with Sovereign (£334.5k), and Temporary Accommodation Refurbishments (£38k), all projects with proposed reprofiling are Council funded. The remaining underspend post reprofiling relates London Road Industrial Estate (£330k), the Home Assistance Grant (£20k) and a forecast unutilised balance against Four Houses Corner (£877k).

5.12 In respect of the Environment Service a number of over and under spends have been forecast across a multitude of projects. The bulk of the forecast overspends have been identified against open space improvement, access and cycleway projects. The projects are externally funded and funding adjustments are required to remove the forecast overspends (appendix B). The Newbury Rail Station improvement project is forecasting a £1 million overspend, the project is externally funded (LEP) and a funding adjustment is expected to remove the overspend position (appendix B). Key underspending projects include the Robinhood & A4 improvement project (£1 million) and the LEP funded Theale Rail Station improvement project (£1.97 million). Three projects have reprofiling proposals: Theale Rail Station (£1.97 million), Robinhood & A4 (£1 million), and the Diamond Greenham changing facilities improvement project (£120k). All proposed reprofiling is externally funded.

## The Resources Directorate

5.13 The directorate is forecasting total expenditure of £10.1 million against a budget of £10.9 million generating a forecast underspend position of £767k. Reprofiling of expenditure totalling £499k has been proposed. Post proposed reprofiling the directorate will be forecasting a £268k underspend position.

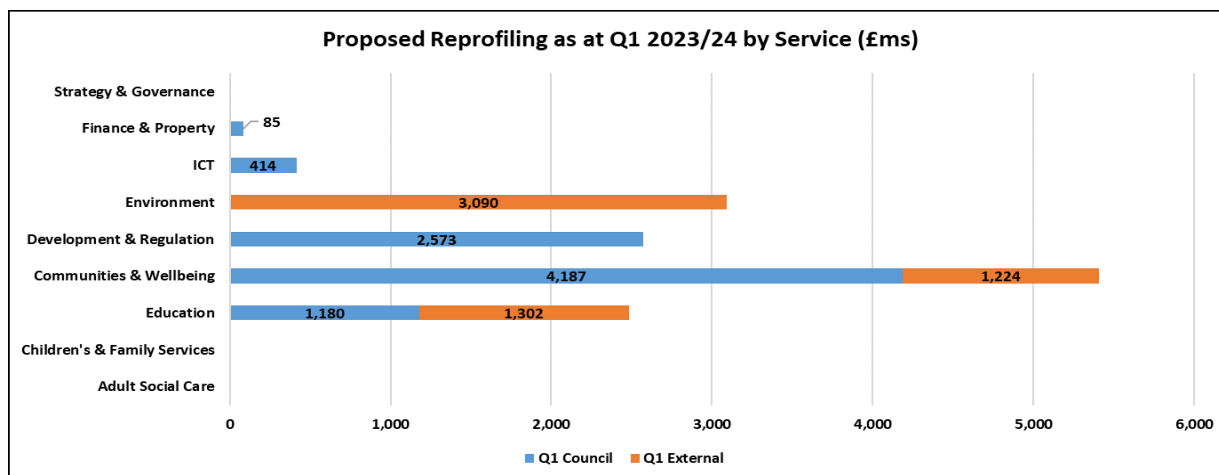
## Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One

Directorate	Approved Programme (inc reprofiling from 2022/23)	Q1 Budget	Q1 Forecast Expenditure	Forecast (Under)/Over spend	Expenditure Reprofiling Requested	Revised Budget	Forecast (Under)/Over spend adjusted for Re-Profiling
ICT	£7,573,600	£7,573,600	£7,004,430	(£569,170)	£413,540	£7,160,060	(£155,630)
Finance & Property	£2,073,860	£2,073,860	£2,021,410	(£52,450)	£85,000	£1,988,860	£32,550
Strategy & Governance	£1,219,990	£1,219,990	£1,074,420	(£145,570)	£	£1,219,990	(£145,570)
Directorate Totals	£10,867,450	£10,867,450	£10,100,260	(£767,190)	£498,540	£10,368,910	(£268,650)

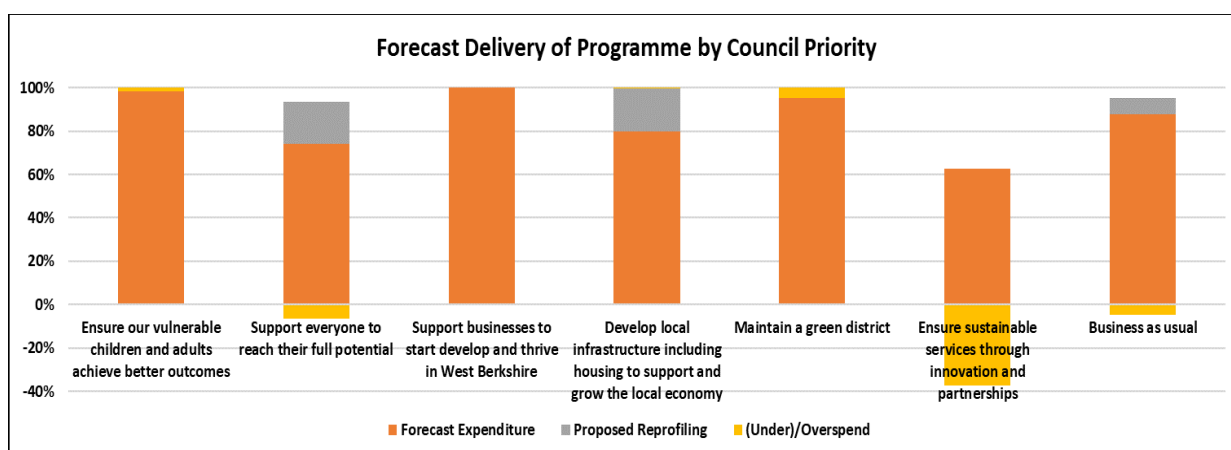
- 5.14 In respect of ICT, significantly underspending projects include: Network infrastructure – core switches (£90k), Hardware Refresh project (£79k), Disaster Recovery Maintenance (£93k), Telephony Infrastructure (£100k) and the Generator Refresh project (£100k). Key project overspends include: Corporate IT Replacement (£75k), and Server Windows Licencing costs (£90k). £414k of future expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into 2024/25 including forecast in year underspends against: Hardware Refresh, Network Infrastructure, and the Corporate Database Server Replacement project full details of proposed reprofiling is included in appendix D. All proposed reprofiling for the ICT Service is Council funded.
- 5.15 In respect of the Finance & Property Service, delivery of the Moorside Community Sports Centre is proposed to be reprofiled into 2024/25 generating an in year underspend of £85k. Post proposed reprofiling the service will be forecasting a £32k overspend due to additional security costs for Chestnut Walk (£14k), and additional expenditure on non-corporate unallocated buildings, i.e. not allocated to a specific service (£10k).
- 5.16 The Strategy & Governance Service is forecasting a £146k underspend against two projects: Education Management System (£136k) and the Schools Participatory Budget Exercise (10k). No reprofiling has been proposed by the service.

### Proposals

- 5.17 The Council finances capital a year in arrears in accordance with the approved Investment & Borrowing Strategy. The Investment & Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2023/24 was approved by Council in March 2023. Expenditure against the capital programme incurred in 2023/24 will be financed in financial year 2024/25.
- 5.18 Appendix D details all reprofiling proposals as at quarter one. Total reprofiling proposals of £14.1 million will adjust the currently forecast underspend position from £15.1 million to a revised underspend of just over £1.0 million. Proposed reprofiling is split between external funding of £5.6 million and Council funding of £8.5 million. The graphic below details proposed reprofiling by service split between external and Council funding.



5.19 In respect of overall programme delivery, 85% of the programme is forecast to be delivered, 16.4% of planned expenditure reprofiled into financial year 2024/25. 1.2% of the programme relates to projects that are forecast to be underspent at the year end and do not require reprofiling. The graphic below details percentage delivery on a Council priority basis.



5.20 Reprofiled throughout the financial is incorporated into the annual capital programme budget setting process to ensure all capital financing assumptions remain robust and sustainable.

## 6 Other options considered

Not applicable.

## 7 Conclusion

7.1 The capital programme is subject to a number of financial risks. Construction inflation (currently forecast at 8 - 10% compared to an assumed level of 2%) potentially resulting in current contracts being subject to a reduction in scope to deliver within agreed financial terms and tender cost for new projects subject to significant increases. The scale of the programme itself is also dependant on sufficient resourcing both internally and externally being available to support delivery. At quarter one £14.1 million of expenditure is proposed to be reprofiled into 2024/25 which equated to 16.4% of the 2023/24 capital programme.

- 7.2 All capital expenditure must be financed, The Prudential Code requires authorities to look at capital and investment plans in light of overall organisation strategy and resources to ensure that decisions are made with sufficient regard to the long term financing implications and risks to the Council. A key indicator is the Council's Authorised Limit for external for debt which was approved at Council in March 2023, at £378.9 million for the current financial year. As well as the level of borrowing needed to fund capital expenditure, the Limit also allows for debt embedded in the Waste PFI contract and any temporary borrowing which is required for cash flow purposes during the year.
- 7.3 As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the Council's total level of long term borrowing to fund capital spend stood at £181.9 million. During financial year 2022/23 a strategy of not undertaking long term borrowing in respect of Public Works and Loan Board (PWLB) financing was pursued, (enabled by in year reprofiling of expenditure), instead focusing on supporting delivery of the capital programme through short term borrowing and cash balances. The strategy of keeping borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, in order to reduce risk and keep interest costs has minimised the impact of rising PWLB rates on the Council. This strategy has continued in the first quarter of 2023/24.
- 7.4 In August 2021 HM Treasury significantly revised guidance for the PWLB lending facility and CIPFA published its revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance and Treasury Management Code on 20th December 2021. The Code also states that it is not prudent for local authorities to make investment or spending decision that will increase the Capital Financing Requirement – "CFR" - (which represents an authority's underlying need to borrow for capital purposes), unless directly and primarily related to the functions of the authority. The 2023/24 capital programme is expected to increase the Council's CFR to £302.2 million.

FY ending	2023 Actual £'000	2024 Projection £'000	2025 Projection £'000	2026 Projection £'000
Capital Financing requirement	279,896	302,190	340,751	358,194
Less other debt liabilities	-10,670	-9,807	-8,892	-7,920
Loans Capital Financing Req.	269,226	292,383	331,859	350,273
Less: Existing External Borrowing	-189,890	-181,973	-177,241	-172,732
<b>Internal (Over) Borrowing</b>	<b>79,336</b>	<b>110,411</b>	<b>154,618</b>	<b>177,542</b>
Less: Balance Sheet Resources	-100,006	-82,646	-83,646	-84,646
<b>Investments / (New Borrowing) *</b>	<b>20,670</b>	<b>-27,765</b>	<b>-70,972</b>	<b>-92,896</b>

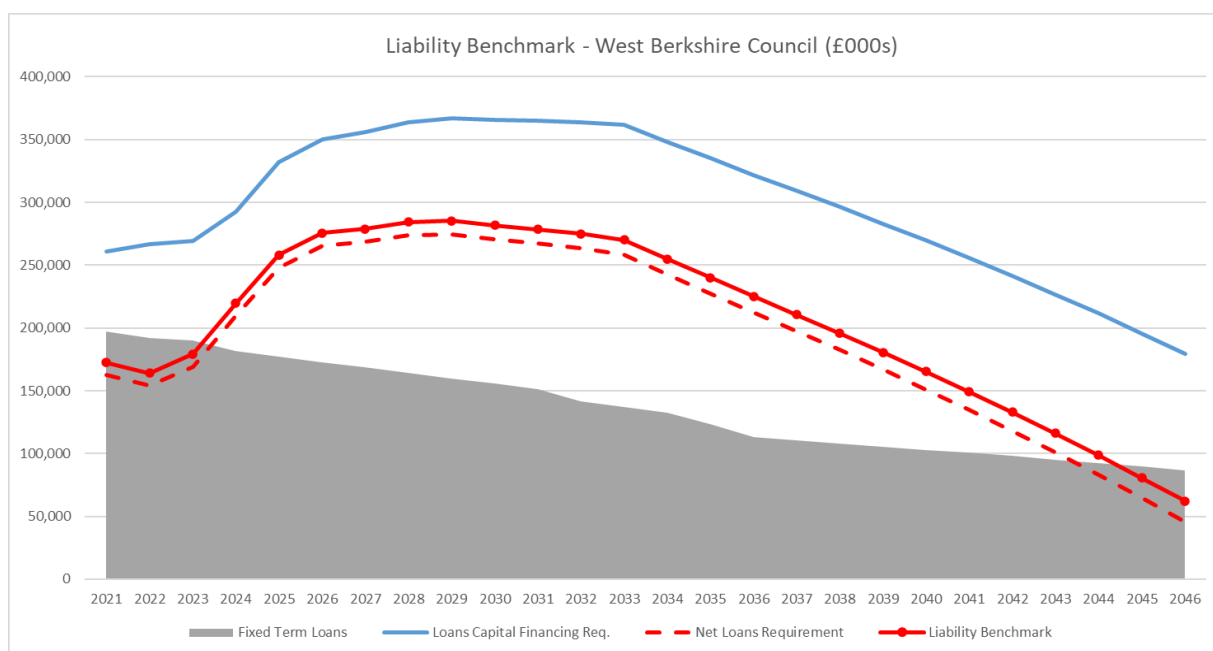
\* Note: estimates exclude £10m liquidity allowance

- 7.5 Capital financing costs are incurred a year in arrears hence the cost of financing 2023/24 capital expenditure will fall into financial year 2024/25. Based on the outturn position, the Council's Balance Sheet forecast indicates that further borrowing will be required in financial year 2024/25 and current planning indicates a £37.8 million borrowing requirement in 2023/24. It should be noted that the Balance Sheet resources assumption are based on draft 2022/23 accounts, taking into consideration the current balances of usable reserves (£47.6 million) and working capital (debtors and creditors of £52.4 million). Until such time the accounts are finalised, and an audit opinion

provided by the Council's external auditors, the figures remain draft and hence are subject to adjustment.

7.6 To compare the Council's actual borrowing against an alternative strategy, a liability benchmark has been calculated showing the lowest risk level of borrowing. This assumes the same forecasts as the table above, but that cash and investment balances are kept to a minimum level of £10 million at each year-end to maintain sufficient liquidity. The liability benchmark is an important tool to help establish whether the Council is likely to be a long-term borrower or long-term investor in the future, and so shape its strategic focus and decision making. The liability benchmark itself represents an estimate of the cumulative amount of external borrowing the Council must hold to fund its current capital and revenue plans while keeping treasury investments at the minimum level required to manage day-to-day cash flow. Councils are now required as part of in year reporting to publish the liability benchmark.

FY ending	2023 Actual £'000	2024 Projection £'000	2025 Projection £'000	2026 Projection £'000
Loans Capital Financing Req.	269,226	292,383	331,859	350,273
Less: Balance Sheet Resources	-100,006	-82,646	-83,646	-84,646
Net Loans Requirement	169,220	209,737	248,213	265,627
Preferred Year-end Position	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
<b>Liability Benchmark</b>	<b>179,220</b>	<b>219,737</b>	<b>258,213</b>	<b>275,627</b>



7.7 Based on the Council's CFR and the liability benchmark, the Council is a long term borrower. The Council is required to ensure that capital financing is reasonable and affordable in the long term. CIPFA recommends that the optimum position for external borrowing should be at the level of the Liability Benchmark (i.e., all balance sheet resources should be used to maximise internal borrowing). If the outputs show future periods where external loans are less than the Liability Benchmark, then this indicates a borrowing requirement thus identifying where the authority is exposed to interest rate,



liquidity and refinancing risks. Conversely where external loans exceed the Liability Benchmark then this will highlight an over borrowed position which will result in excess cash in the organisation requiring investment thus exposing the authority to credit and reinvestment risks and a potential cost of carry. The table below sets out the Council's borrowing position compared to its Liability Benchmark.

FY ending	2023 Actual £'000	2024 Projection £'000	2025 Projection £'000	2026 Projection £'000
Existing External Borrowing	189,890	181,973	177,241	172,732
Liability Benchmark	179,220	219,737	258,213	275,627

7.8 Based on the outturn position, the Council, currently is in an over borrowed position. However, as set out in the Investment and Borrowing Strategy for 2023/24 (as approved by Council in March 2023), the Council is currently utilising cash flows to maintain an internally borrowed position, resulting in the external borrowing levels reducing against the Liability Benchmark. On this basis, alongside a position of borrowing remaining lower than the Council's Capital Financing Requirement, the s151 Officer is confident that capital expenditure is affordable in the longer term.

## 8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Budget Changes as at Quarter One
- 8.2 Appendix B – Budget Changes – External Funding Adjustments
- 8.3 Appendix C – New Council Funded Projects
- 8.4 Appendix D – Proposed Reprofiting

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

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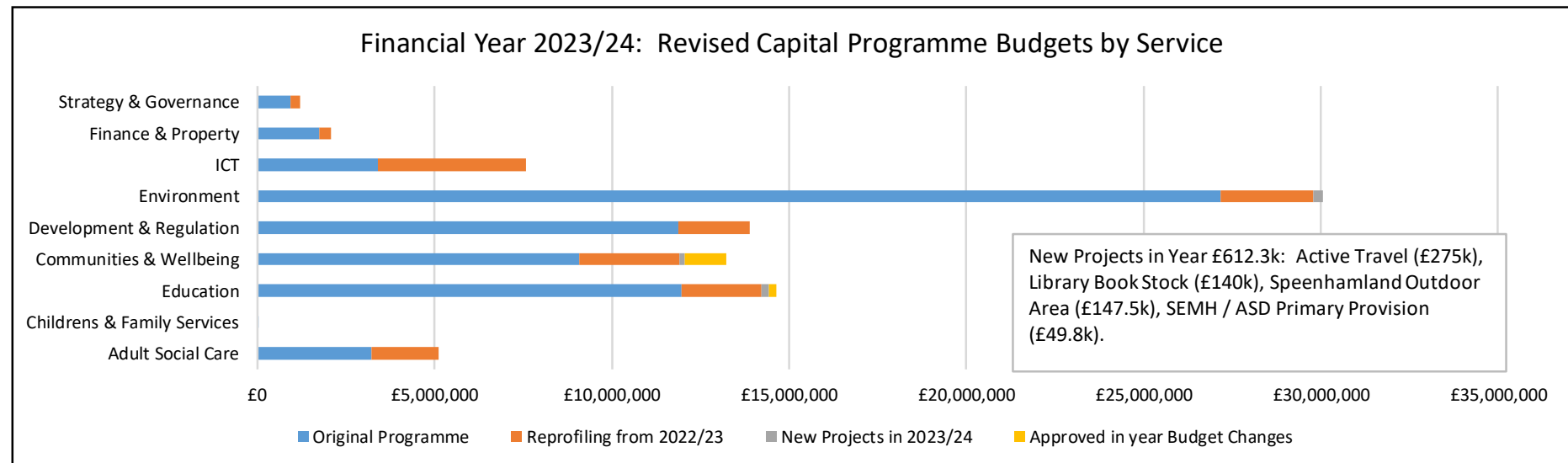
**Officer details:**

Name: Shannon Coleman-Slaughter  
Job Title: Acting Head of Finance & Property  
Tel No: 01635 503225  
E-mail: Shannon.colemanslaughter@westberks.gov.uk

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## Budget Changes as at Quarter One

	Original Programme	Reprofiling from 2022/23	New Projects in 2023/24	Approved in year Budget Changes	Revised Service Budget
Adult Social Care	£3,227,530	£1,890,100	£0	£0	£5,117,630
Childrens & Family Services	£30,000	£0	£0	£0	£30,000
Education	£11,966,010	£2,258,760	£197,300	£210,730	£14,632,800
Communities & Wellbeing	£9,085,160	£2,826,030	£140,000	£1,172,860	£13,224,050
Development & Regulation	£11,867,160	£2,026,150	£0	£0	£13,893,310
Environment	£27,162,380	£2,618,540	£275,000	£0	£30,055,920
ICT	£3,415,630	£4,157,970	£0	£0	£7,573,600
Finance & Property	£1,755,850	£318,010	£0	£0	£2,073,860
Strategy & Governance	£938,320	£281,670	£0	£0	£1,219,990
<b>Total Council</b>	<b>£69,448,040</b>	<b>£16,377,230</b>	<b>£612,300</b>	<b>£1,383,590</b>	<b>£87,821,160</b>



## Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One

Cost Centre Description / Project Name	Original Budget	Additional Expenditure Budget	Revised Expenditure Budget	Original External Funding	Additional External Funding	Revised External Funding Budget	Capital Strategy Group (CSG) Approvals
Speenhamland Outdoor Area	£0	£147,540	£147,540	£0	£0	£0	New project approved at CSG 23/03/23
Additional Places - Secondary Basic Need	£278,990	£60,620	£339,610	-£205,420	-£60,620	-£266,040	Budget & Funding bought forward from 24/25 agreed J Holmes email 01/03/23
SEMH/ASD Resourced Provision - Primary	£1,428,470	£49,760	£1,478,230	-£1,376,670	-£49,760	-£1,426,430	Budget Adjustment Agreed CSG June
The Castle School - Basic need Expansion	£0	£150,110	£150,110	£0	-£150,110	-£150,110	Budget adjustment agreed CSG March
Active Travel Infrastructure	£754,420	£275,000	£1,029,420	-£620,000	-£275,000	-£895,000	Additional Grant funded budget approved CSG 22/06/23
Hungerford LC - Modular exercise studio	£284,390	£104,170	£388,560	£0		£0	Additional Budget agreed CSG 23/03/23
Libraries Book Stock	£0	£273,690	£273,690	£0		£0	£133,690 bought forward from 24/25 agreed S151 31/03 a further £140k agreed CSG 22/06/23
Newbury Sports Hub (PPS)	£3,190,000	£935,000	£4,125,000	£0		£0	Additional Budget approved Exec 23/03/23
<b>Total Changes at Quarter One</b>	<b>£5,936,270</b>	<b>£1,995,890</b>	<b>£7,932,160</b>	<b>-£2,202,090</b>	<b>-£535,490</b>	<b>-£2,737,580</b>	

## Budget Changes: External Funding Adjustments

Service	Project Name	Original gross expenditure budget	Additional Expenditure Budget	New gross expenditure Budget	Original Council Funding	Changes to Council Funding (Reduction) / Increase	Revised Council Funding Budget	Original External Funding	Additional External Funding	Revised External Funding Budget	Comment
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Communities & Wellbeing	Libraries Public PC Replacement	2,080	0	2,080	2,080	(2,080)	0	0	2,080	2,080	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Theale Primary Basic Need Project	164,030	0	164,030	164,030	(164,030)	0	0	164,030	164,030	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Highwood Copse	467,420	0	467,420	326,690	(185,960)	140,730	140,730	185,960	326,690	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	The Winchcombe Primary - Basic Need Bulge	1,360	0	1,360	1,360	(1,360)	0	0	1,360	1,360	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	i-college Alternative Education - East of Area	714,300	0	714,300	399,790	(76,820)	322,970	314,510	76,820	391,330	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Special Provision Fund Allocation - Intervention	2,530	0	2,530	2,530	(2,530)	0	0	2,530	2,530	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	SEMH/ASD Resourced Provision - Secondary	3,486,830	0	3,486,830	1,852,300	(29,840)	1,822,460	1,634,530	29,840	1,664,370	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Downlands Sport Centre - replacement and expansion	27,090	0	27,090	27,090	(27,090)	0	0	27,090	27,090	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Falkland Primary School - Classroom Replacement	262,030	0	262,030	66,430	(20,000)	46,430	195,600	20,000	215,600	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Additional Places - Secondary Basic Need	339,610	0	339,610	73,570	(73,570)	0	266,040	73,570	339,610	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	North Newbury - New primary school	290,970	0	290,970	290,970	(290,970)	0	0	290,970	290,970	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Thatcham Park Early Years Accomodation	64,330	0	64,330	10,000	(10,000)	0	54,330	10,000	64,330	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Castle School Ways of Working Facility	577,080	0	577,080	10,000	(10,000)	0	567,080	10,000	577,080	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Engaging Potential	207,850	0	207,850	5,000	(5,000)	0	202,850	5,000	207,850	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Mortimer St John's Infants School - relocation	148,000	0	148,000	5,000	(5,000)	0	143,000	5,000	148,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Kennet School Physical Disability Resource	50,000	0	50,000	50,000	(50,000)	0	0	50,000	50,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Education	Brookfields Expansion	790,740	0	790,740	97,000	(97,000)	0	693,740	97,000	790,740	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Village Speed Limits	62,760	0	62,760	32,760	(32,760)	0	30,000	32,760	62,760	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Local Sfty Acc Reduct	117,970	0	117,970	42,970	(42,970)	0	75,000	42,970	117,970	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Ftwy Imp Existing &New	480,000	0	480,000	235,000	(235,000)	0	245,000	235,000	480,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Recreational Walk Rout	42,240	51,300	93,540	0	0	0	42,240	51,300	93,540	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Signing Improvements	62,490	0	62,490	32,490	(32,490)	0	30,000	32,490	62,490	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Traffic Signal Upgrades	411,790	0	411,790	341,790	(341,790)	0	70,000	341,790	411,790	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Active Travel Infrastructure	1,029,420	0	1,029,420	114,420	(114,420)	0	915,000	114,420	1,029,420	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Rights Of Way Volunter	2,500	1,970	4,470	0	0	0	2,500	1,970	4,470	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Disabled Access To Cty	7,000	20,000	27,000	0	0	0	7,000	20,000	27,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Bridleway Imp Ped	32,070	8,140	40,210	18,180	8,140	26,320	13,890	0	13,890	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Recreational Cycleways	13,880	14,530	28,410	0	0	0	13,880	14,530	28,410	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment

## Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One

		Original gross expenditure budget	Additional Expenditure Budget	New gross expenditure Budget	Original Council Funding	Changes to Council Funding (Reduction) / Increase	Revised Council Funding Budget	Original External Funding	Additional External Funding	Revised External Funding Budget	Comment
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Environment	Rural Signing	0	5,270	5,270	0	5,270	5,270	0	0	0	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Land Drainage	441,700	0	441,700	141,700	(141,700)	0	300,000	141,700	441,700	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Future Programme Development	109,460	0	109,460	9,460	(9,460)	0	100,000	9,460	109,460	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Robin Hood Roundabout & A4	1,489,160	0	1,489,160	89,160	(89,160)	0	1,400,000	89,160	1,489,160	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Public Transport Infrastructure	118,500	0	118,500	68,500	(68,500)	0	50,000	68,500	118,500	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Kings Road Link, Newbury	562,800	0	562,800	562,800	(562,800)	0	0	562,800	562,800	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Aldermaston Footways	230,300	0	230,300	230,300	(230,300)	0	0	230,300	230,300	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Newbury Town Centre Paving	56,290	0	56,290	56,290	(56,290)	0	0	56,290	56,290	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Newbury Rail Station Road Improvements	2,555,500	1,053,000	3,608,500	0	0	0	2,555,500	1,053,000	3,608,500	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	On Street Electrical Charge Point	474,800	0	474,800	324,800	(324,800)	0	150,000	324,800	474,800	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Reactive Maintenance	146,010	0	146,010	14,010	(14,010)	0	132,000	14,010	146,010	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Environment Strategy - Minor Projects and Improvements	150,000	29,000	179,000	0	29,000	29,000	150,000	0	150,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Hampstead Norreys Flood Alleviation Scheme	40,000	0	40,000	40,000	(40,000)	0	0	40,000	40,000	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Pavement to St Mary's School	14,210	0	14,210	14,210	(14,210)	0	0	14,210	14,210	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Theale Station Improvements	3,469,560	400,000	3,869,560	0	0	0	3,469,560	400,000	3,869,560	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Phoenix Centre Access Improvements	255,900	0	255,900	255,900	(255,900)	0	0	255,900	255,900	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP)	993,800	0	993,800	324,750	(324,750)	0	669,050	324,750	993,800	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Open Space Improvements	92,000	138,210	230,210	0	50,000	50,000	92,000	88,210	180,210	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Council Carbon Management Plan	142,780	18,760	161,540	142,780	18,760	161,540	0	0	0	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Urban tree fund	25,000	6,990	31,990	25,000	6,990	31,990	0	0	0	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Henwick Sports Pavillion	0	10,240	10,240	0	0	0	0	10,240	10,240	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Natural Carbon Reduction Measures	0	190,070	190,070	0	190,070	190,070	0	0	0	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
Environment	Wildflower verge treatment	50,000	31,970	81,970	0	25,000	25,000	50,000	6,970	56,970	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
ICT	MHCLG Full Fibre to Schools Project	1,679,470	0	1,679,470	754,330	(714,330)	40,000	925,140	714,330	1,639,470	22/23 outturn external funding adjustment
		<b>22,955,610</b>	<b>1,979,450</b>	<b>24,935,060</b>	<b>7,255,440</b>	<b>(4,363,660)</b>	<b>2,891,780</b>	<b>15,700,170</b>	<b>6,343,110</b>	<b>22,043,280</b>	

Overall impact of external funding changes is a reduction in the Council funded requirement of £4.4 million and a total expenditure increase in the programme of £1.9 million.

## Appendix C

### Budget Changes: New Council Funded Projects

Service	Cost Centre Description / Project Name	Original gross expenditure budget	Additional Expenditure Budget	New gross expenditure Budget	Original Council Funding	Additional Council Funding	New Council Funding Budget	Original External Funding	Additional External Funding	New External Funding Budget	Comment
Adult Social Care	Social Care Case Management System Replacement	0	223,590	223,590	0	223,590	223,590	0	0	0	New project for 27/07/23 CSG
Elections & Land Charges	Elections Equipment Purchase - Voting Booths	0	40,550	40,550	0	40,550	40,550	0	0	0	New project for 27/07/23 CSG
Finance & Property	Market Street External CCTV Installation	0	18,000	18,000	0	18,000	18,000	0	0	0	New project for 27/07/23 CSG
Finance & Property	IFRS16 Software	0	22,500	22,500	0	22,500	22,500	0	0	0	New project for 27/07/23 CSG
		<b>0</b>	<b>304,640</b>	<b>304,640</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>304,640</b>	<b>304,640</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

Proposed Reprofiling

Directorate	Service	Project Title	Gross 2023/24	Forecast	Underspend at	Re-profiling	Externally	Council	Approved	2024/25	
			Expenditure Budget	Outturn at Q1	Q1	Request	Funded Re-profiling	Funded Value	2024/25 Budget	Budget inc Re-profiling	
			£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
People	Education	Highwood Copse	467,420	223,670	(243,750)	100,000	0	(100,000)	0	100,000	
People	Education	i-college Alternative Education - East of Area	714,300	599,600	(114,700)	3,990	0	(3,990)	43,490	47,480	
People	Education	Calcot Schools Remodelling	1,351,980	225,940	(1,126,040)	1,126,040	(80,440)	(1,045,600)	4,205,120	5,331,160	
People	Education	North Newbury - New primary school	290,970	50,000	(240,970)	240,970	(240,970)	0	4,280,740	4,521,710	
People	Education	Thatcham Park Early Years Accomodation	64,330	20,000	(44,330)	44,330	(44,330)	0	54,330	98,660	
People	Education	Engaging Potential	207,850	20,000	(187,850)	187,850	(187,850)	0	601,430	789,280	
People	Education	Mortimer St John's Infants School - relocation	148,000	-	(148,000)	148,000	(148,000)	0	3,450	151,450	
People	Education	Brookfields Expansion	790,740	190,600	(600,140)	600,140	(600,140)	0	37,260	637,400	
People	Education	SEND Strategy Infrastructure Delivery	30,000	30,000	0	30,000	0	(30,000)	535,160	565,160	
<b>Education Total</b>			<b>4,065,590</b>	<b>1,359,810</b>	<b>(2,705,780)</b>	<b>2,481,320</b>	<b>(1,301,730)</b>	<b>(1,179,590)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,760,980</b>	<b>12,242,300</b>
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Leisure Centre Compliance & Modernisation	393,500	130,000	(263,500)	263,500	0	(263,500)	307,000	570,500	
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Expansion of Berkshire Records Office. Reading	1,447,450	5,000	(1,442,450)	1,442,450	(1,183,000)	(259,450)	550,000	1,992,450	
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Playing Pitch Action Plan	734,670	426,000	(308,670)	308,670	0	(308,670)	836,570	1,145,240	
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Planned maintenance of library buildings	141,000	70,000	(71,000)	71,000	(41,000)	(30,000)	100,000	171,000	
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Northcroft Leisure Centre (Dryside Refurbishment)	2,000,000	1,000,000	(1,000,000)	1,000,000	0	(1,000,000)	2,500,000	3,500,000	
People	Communities & Wellbeing	Newbury Sports Hub (PPS)	4,125,000	1,800,000	(2,325,000)	2,325,000	0	(2,325,000)	836,575	3,161,575	
<b>Communities &amp; Wellbeing Total</b>			<b>8,841,620</b>	<b>3,431,000</b>	<b>(5,410,620)</b>	<b>5,410,620</b>	<b>(1,224,000)</b>	<b>(4,186,620)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5,130,145</b>	<b>10,540,765</b>
Place	Development & Regulation	Four Houses Corner	4,777,350	1,700,000	(3,077,350)	2,200,000	0	(2,200,000)	66,000	2,266,000	
Place	Development & Regulation	Sovereign Joint Venture	334500	-	(334,500)	334,500	0	(334,500)	0	334,500	
Place	Development & Regulation	Temp Accommodation Refurbishment	55440	15,000	(40,440)	38,440	0	(38,440)	17,940	56,380	
<b>Development &amp; Regulation Total</b>			<b>5,167,290</b>	<b>1,715,000</b>	<b>(3,452,290)</b>	<b>2,572,940</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(2,572,940)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>83,940</b>	<b>2,656,880</b>
Place	Environment	Theale Station Improvements	3,469,560	1,500,000	(1,969,560)	1,969,560	(1,969,560)	0	0	1,969,560	
Place	Environment	Robin Hood Roundabout & A4	1,489,160	489,160	(1,000,000)	1,000,000	(1,000,000)	0	0	1,000,000	
Place	Environment	The Diamond Greenham - Changing facilities improvement.	120,000	-	(120,000)	120,000	(120,000)	0	0	120,000	
<b>Environment Total</b>			<b>5,078,720</b>	<b>1,989,160</b>	<b>(3,089,560)</b>	<b>3,089,560</b>	<b>(3,089,560)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,089,560</b>	
Resources	ICT	VMWare Hardware Refresh	108,540	30,000	(78,540)	78,540	0	(78,540)	10,000	88,540	
Resources	ICT	Network Infrastructure (Core Switches)	90,000	-	(90,000)	90,000	0	(90,000)	0	90,000	
Resources	ICT	Refresh MFD Fleet	200,000	30,000	(170,000)	170,000	0	(170,000)	0	170,000	
Resources	ICT	Corporate Database Server Replacement	82,000	20,000	(62,000)	30,000	0	(30,000)	40,000	70,000	
Resources	ICT	Network/ App Performance Monitoring	20,000	-	(20,000)	20,000	0	(20,000)	5,000	25,000	
Resources	ICT	Backup / Security products for O365 data	25,000	-	(25,000)	25,000	0	(25,000)	0	25,000	
<b>Resources Total Total</b>			<b>525,540</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>(445,540)</b>	<b>413,540</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(413,540)</b>	<b>55,000</b>	<b>468,540</b>	
Resources	Finance & Property	Moorside Community Centre Sports Hall	100,000	15,000	(85,000)	85,000	0	(85,000)	0	85,000	
<b>Resources Total Total</b>			<b>100,000</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>(85,000)</b>	<b>85,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(85,000)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>85,000</b>	
<b>Q1 - Council Total</b>			<b>23,778,760</b>	<b>8,589,970</b>	<b>(15,188,790)</b>	<b>14,052,980</b>	<b>(5,615,290)</b>	<b>(8,437,690)</b>	<b>15,030,065</b>	<b>29,083,045</b>	



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# 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Iain Cottingham
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	6 September 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Melanie Ellis
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4360

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. This report is Quarter One for the 2023/24 financial year. The report is highlighting the financial position at each quarter of the financial year and impact on the Council's General Fund position. This allows the Executive and Scrutiny Commission to consider the implications and the actions being taken to mitigate and manage the position.
- 1.2 The Council is forecasting a significant overspend across many services, especially in the People Directorate, in Quarter One. This is due to increasing demand on services, continued inflationary cost pressures and additional staffing costs through the use of agency workers.
- 1.3 To mitigate the financial pressures, the Council has immediately implemented measures from July 2023 to provide greater oversight and scrutiny of financial decisions and financial commitments, as well as additional approval mechanisms for staffing and agency arrangements across the Council. It is anticipated that the rapid deployment of these measures will reduce the overspend forecast for Quarter Two.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the £6.3m overspend.
- 2.2 To note the implementation of measures included in the report around recruitment, staffing and agency.
- 2.3 To note the establishment of a Financial Review Panel (FRP) to meet weekly to ensure the spending limits are being adhered to.
- 2.4 To request that opportunities for raising in year capital receipts are brought forward to a future Executive meeting.

### 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>The forecast position at Q1 of a £6.3m overspend has significant financial implications. The General Fund is at £7.2m, with a minimum recommended level of £7m. If the £6.3m overspend remains at year end, it would leave a General Fund of £0.9m. There is a low level of earmarked reserves. This is a very low level of general fund balance and actions in place will be closely monitored to ensure that the in-year financial position improves.</p> <p>The minimum level of general fund balance recommended by the s151 officer is £7m and this would put the Council at significantly below this for future budget setting; this would mean an increase in future year's budget savings over and above initial forecasts for 2024-25 to replenish the level of reserves in the future.</p>			
<b>Human Resource:</b>	The FRP (Financial Review Panel) implications have been reviewed by Service Lead (HR) as a member of the panel.			
<b>Legal:</b>	The FRP (Financial Review Panel) implications have been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	Measures have been included in the report to provide greater levels of scrutiny on much lower levels of expenditure and recruitment costs.			
<b>Property:</b>	Review of assets to be undertaken with a view to possible sales that could be utilised for reduced capital financing costs and / or funding for a range of transformational activity across the Council to reduce costs.			
<b>Policy:</b>	None directly			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>

<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		y		
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		y		The proposal aims to continue to protect those characteristics
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		y		Unlikely to have any long term environmental impact.
<b>Health Impact:</b>		y		
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		y		N/A
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		y		N/A
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>			y	The proposal could reduce spend on some areas of council priority.
<b>Core Business:</b>		y		
<b>Data Impact:</b>				No impact
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Service Directors, Executive Directors.			

## 4 Executive Summary

4.1 The Quarter One forecast is showing a substantial financial pressure for the Council. Primarily driven through cost pressures in the People directorate, with growing demand for social care services, additional staffing costs through the use of agency staff and

inflationary pressures, the People directorate alone is forecasting an overspend in excess of £5.8m. There are other financial pressures, in the planning services, unachieved income and delayed additional planning income charges via Government changes mean a forecast overspend of £0.6m in the Place directorate.

4.2 The General Fund reserve is currently at £7.2m (per the 2022/23 Financial Statements), which is only £0.2m above the S151 officer's minimum recommended level, as set out in the 2023/24 budget papers. As a result, the Council cannot end 2023/24 with a significant overspend, without reserves being depleted far below the recommended minimum level.

4.3 There have been a large number of Councils in recent weeks and months highlighting significant financial pressures for the 2023/24 financial year. Though it is difficult to analyse every Council's in year position due to timing of respective committees across the country, as at early August 2023, the following Councils have reported significant in year financial difficulties;

- Medway Council
- Leeds City Council
- Hastings BC
- Guildford BC
- Shropshire Council
- Brighton & Hove
- Southampton Council
- Kent County Council
- Bradford Council
- Kirklees Council
- Birmingham City Council
- Stoke on Trent Council
- East Lothian Council

4.4 To reduce the financial pressure and forecasts, the Council has taken rapid pro-active steps to reduce the overspend position from July 2023, these steps include:

- Greater scrutiny and approval of expenditure over £1,000
- Greater scrutiny and approval of recruitment activity and agency expenditure
- Finance led reviews on reviewing accruals policies and capital financial expenditure
- Review of action plans by overspending services to provide further mitigations to reduce overspends
- Review of the flexible use of capital receipts and seek to raise funding through capital receipts to fund eligible transformation spend
- Greater in year budget monitoring review of overspending services

- 4.5 The purpose of these measures has been to reduce the overspend position as well as seek alternative options to reduce the overspend in future budget monitoring reports. The Council undertook a month 2 budget monitoring exercise to provide an early assessment of any financial pressures and so has been able to deploy these cost control measures early in the financial year and seek to achieve the greater possible benefit of these measures being in place. It is expected that these measures will lead to an improvement in the Quarter 2 forecasts. Some of the mitigations may have an impact on service delivery, though it is expected that these will be kept to a minimum as posts and expenditure that affect the most vulnerable are being prioritised and the Council is continuing to operate all services.
- 4.6 The implication of an overspend in excess of £0.2m in 2023/24, would be to take the general fund reserve below the s151 officer's minimum level. In order to replenish the general fund reserve, greater levels of savings than currently forecast for 2024/25 would be required, or Full Council would need to consider accepting a budget with even greater risk for future financial years with lower than recommended reserves.
- 4.7 If the Council was to overspend by more than £7.2m the Council would need to consider what options are available for exceptional financial support. Most likely, the Council would need to formally approach the Government for a capitalisation directive. A capitalisation directive would allow the Government to provide the Council with one off funding as capital, which could be used to fund revenue. To enable this, the Government would require a form of intervention through a formal review of the Council as a likely minimum. Other Councils have been provided with this funding by the Government in recent years.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exceptional-financial-support-for-local-authorities-capitalisation-directions>

This would provide short term financial relief, if approved, though the Council would remain with a challenging longer term financial position that would require additional savings, alongside the additional cost of repaying the capitalisation directive. At present, the Council is not proposing to request a capitalisation directive, but this cannot be ruled out in the current financial year until the in-year financial position is brought down to much closer to a break even position.

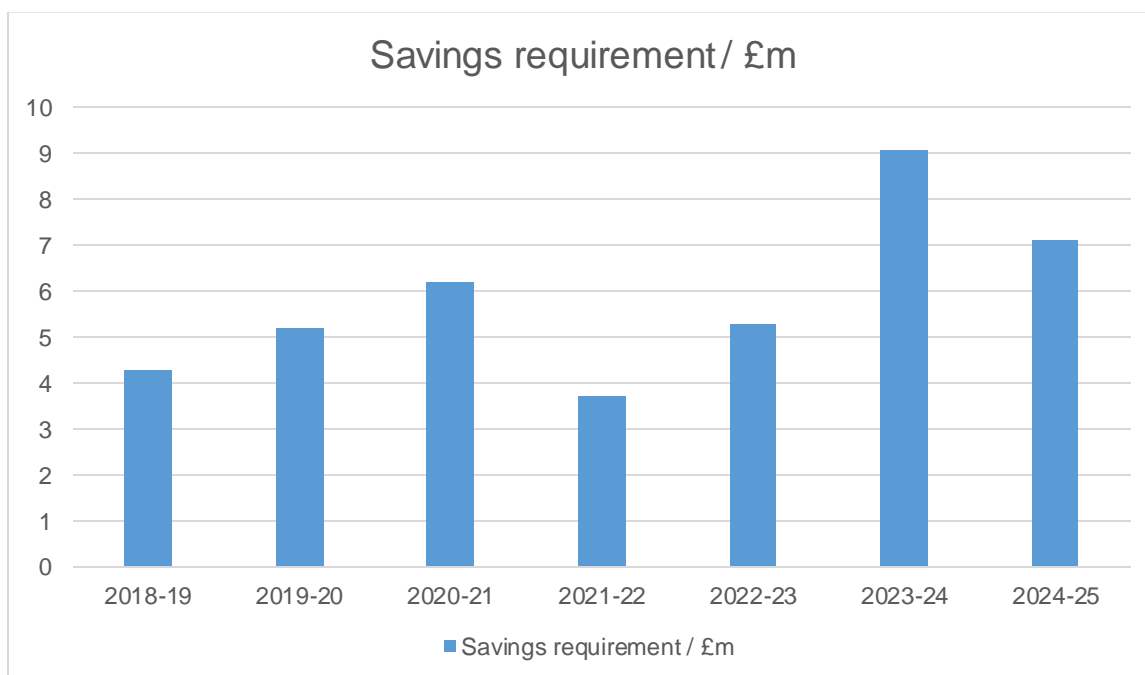
- 4.8 If in the longer term the financial pressure is not reduced, the Council's s151 Officer would need to consider issuing a section 114 notice; this is not being considered in the short term due to the mitigations being put in place at present in the 2023-24 financial year to mitigate the in year pressure. Any formal Section 114 notice would flow from the section of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 states:

*“The chief finance officer of a relevant authority shall make a report under this section if it appears to him that the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in a financial year is likely to exceed the resources (including sums borrowed) available to it to meet that expenditure”*

- 4.9 The notice would need to go to Full Council who would have to respond within 21 days on what steps it will take. The issuance of a section 114 notice must be subject to consultation with the Head of Paid Service and Monitoring Officer. This still remains a

rare issuance in Local Government, and at present, the s151 is not seeking to issue one of these notices.

4.10 The background to the financial position of the Council is that the Council has historically had low levels of reserves, at approximately half of the average of similar Councils. The Council has a track record of strong financial control and stewardship, and though (the Covid-19 pandemic excepted) reserves have remained comparatively low, the Council has achieved financial balance as well as delivered significant financial savings programmes. The savings and investment programme over recent years is highlighted below; on top of this, the 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved in March 2023 highlighted a savings requirement of over £11m over the next three years, heavily weighted to 2024/25 given uncertainties over future fair funding reviews – this totals £40m over a seven year period per the below:



4.11 The Council has also commenced its Transformation programme; this is referenced in the Executive report elsewhere on this agenda. This programme seeks to identify longer term financial savings, but will of course highlight any shorter term opportunities to help support the Council's in year financial position. There is a linked paper on the Executive agenda highlighting the key areas of focus for the Transformation Programme.

4.12 The Quarter One forecast is an overspend of £6.3m as summarised below:

## 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One

2022/23 Directorate Summary	Net Budget	Net Income/ Expenditure	Quarter One					
			Budget Manager Forecast Variance	Use of Earmarked Reserves	Use of General Fund	Forecast variance after Reserves	Mitigation	Year end forecast variance
			£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
People	97,973	107,061	9,088	(238)	0	8,850	(3,010)	5,840
Place	33,733	34,933	1,200	(288)	0	912	(315)	597
Resources	12,170	12,876	706	(389)	0	317	(293)	24
Chief Executive	541	536	(5)	0	0	(5)	0	(5)
Capital Financing/Risk Mgt	14,537	14,380	(157)	0	0	(157)	0	(157)
<b>Total</b>	<b>158,954</b>	<b>169,786</b>	<b>10,832</b>	<b>(916)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,917</b>	<b>(3,618)</b>	<b>6,298</b>

4.13 It is therefore vital that the Corporate Board and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) take immediate steps to reduce expenditure / increase income to reduce the forecast overspend. As a result a number of immediate measures have been put in place to help reduce the overspend as detailed above.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.2 The 2023/24 net revenue budget of £159m was set in March 2023, using £157m revenue funding and £1.8m of reserves. During the 2023/24 budget build, inflationary pressures were identified in demand led services, but not all pressures were built into the budget, with some being held as a risk against the general reserve.
- 5.3 The Quarter One forecast is an overspend of £6.3m after use of £0.9m of specific earmarked reserves and £3.6m service mitigations that are being worked on.
- 5.4 As a result of the initial Q1 forecasts, a number of immediate measures have been put in place to help reduce the overspend. These are detailed elsewhere in the report. The level of overspend is very significant, and as highlighted above, the Council are putting in place measures to reduce the overspend as well as considering what options there are around Capitalisation directives. The Council has no residual capital receipts, but does have the opportunity to further reduce the overspend position by using the flexible use of capital receipts to fund transformational and cost reduction activity. There are teams across the Council, such as digital and project teams who would fit this definition and there is the opportunity to reduce the overspend by many hundreds of thousands of pounds by selling an asset (or assets) to fund this activity. This has been included as a recommendation to the Executive.
- 5.5 The Government will wish to consider the financial position of Councils facing significant financial pressures and in recent years have provided capitalisation directives to a small number of Councils, see the link

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exceptional-financial-support-for-local-authorities-capitalisation-directions>.

In these cases, the Government have provided specific sums of funding to Councils through a capitalisation directive whereby the Council repays the Government (with

additional financial costs) and the Council will be required to have a formal external assurance review on their financial position. This will then be published by the DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up and Communities) and subject to progress and updates on improvement to the Council's financial position.

- 5.6 If the mitigations included in the current forecasts, *including* a capitalisation directive if it was sought, were not to come forward and be delivered, the Council would need to consider issuing a s114 report; this is not the current proposal. Very few Councils have issued section 114 notices (Woking BC, Birmingham City, Slough BC, Croydon and Thurrock being the most recent), and most of those have taken place where there have been significant commercial / property / company purchases with a lack of capital financing repayments, rather than from inflationary pressures. More information on the practicalities of a section 114 notice are included in this link from Woking BC <https://www.woking.gov.uk/section114>

or this from Thurrock Council

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/government-intervention/section-114-notice>,

or this link from Birmingham

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1381/statement\\_regarding\\_section\\_114\\_notice](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1381/statement_regarding_section_114_notice)

#### Quarter One 2023/24

- 5.7 The Quarter One forecast is an overspend of £6.3m, representing 3% of the net revenue budget.



## 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One

2023/24	Net Budget	Net Income/Expenditure	Quarter One					
			Budget Manager Forecast Variance	Use of Earmarked Reserves	Use of General Fund	Forecast variance after Reserves	Mitigation	Year end forecast variance
			£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	62,925	65,946	3,021	(151)	0	2,870	(2,079)	791
Children & Family Services	21,249	25,958	4,709	(87)	0	4,623	(901)	3,721
Executive Director	370	377	7	0	0	7	0	7
Education DSG funded	(444)	(444)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Education	10,708	12,059	1,351	0	0	1,351	(30)	1,321
Public Health & Wellbeing	(80)	(80)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Communities & Wellbeing	3,246	3,246	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>People</b>	<b>97,973</b>	<b>107,061</b>	<b>9,088</b>	<b>(238)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8,850</b>	<b>(3,010)</b>	<b>5,840</b>
Executive Director	213	197	(16)	0	0	(16)	(5)	(21)
Development & Regulation	5,637	6,591	954	(26)	0	928	(310)	618
Environment	27,882	28,144	262	(262)	0	0	0	0
<b>Place</b>	<b>33,733</b>	<b>34,933</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>(288)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>912</b>	<b>(315)</b>	<b>597</b>
ICT	2,437	2,524	88	(23)	0	65	(65)	(0)
Executive Director	317	275	(42)	0	0	(42)	(40)	(82)
Commissioning & Procurement	448	526	77	(143)	0	(65)	(10)	(75)
Finance & Property	1,479	1,762	283	0	0	283	(82)	201
Strategy & Governance	7,489	7,686	197	(121)	0	76	(96)	(20)
Transformation	0	103	103	(103)	0	0	0	0
<b>Resources</b>	<b>12,170</b>	<b>12,876</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>(389)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>(293)</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>536</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(5)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(5)</b>
Capital Financing	14,851	14,694	(157)	0	0	(157)	0	(157)
Risk Management	-314	(314)	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Capital Financing/Risk Mgt</b>	<b>14,537</b>	<b>14,380</b>	<b>(157)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(157)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(157)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>158,954</b>	<b>169,786</b>	<b>10,832</b>	<b>(916)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9,917</b>	<b>(3,618)</b>	<b>6,298</b>

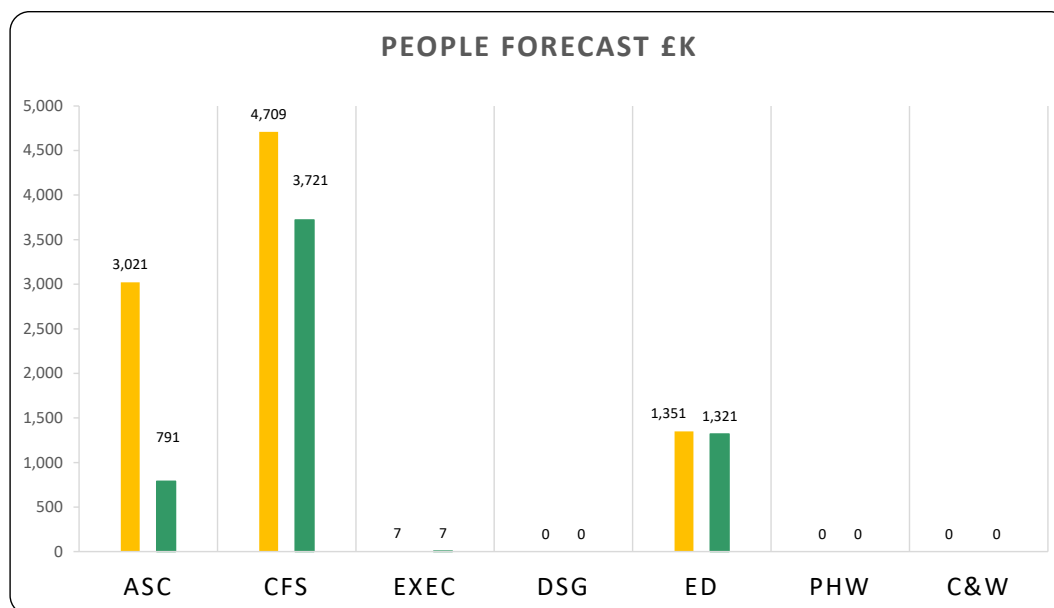
NB: Rounding differences may apply to the nearest £k.

### Impact on Reserves

5.8 The general fund would be reduced to just £0.9m if the current forecast overspend remained at year end. This is significantly below the recommended level for future budget setting as outlined in the report.

### People Directorate

5.9 The People Directorate forecast is an over spend of £5.8m against a budget of £98m, representing 6% of budget.



5.10 In ASC, the overspend is £0.8m, which is 1.3% of the net budget of £63m. This is after the use of Earmarked Reserves of £151k, and £2.1m of mitigations currently underway. The modelled investment request for Adult Social Care packages for 2023/24 was reduced by £1m and held as a risk. This has led to a higher level of overspend. The overspends before mitigations are outlined below.

5.11 ASC long term services (LTS) are £2.5m over spent.

- There are higher client numbers than modelled: 1850 compared to 1823. The rise in clients is attributable to higher levels of new requests for support. This includes high demand from hospital discharge.
- There is an increase in the cost of care packages, due to inflation, complexities and challenges in the external workforce market. This equates to an average increase of 8% per client package since 2022/23.
- There has been lower than modelled occupancy in our own three care homes due to refurbishment and admissions restrictions resulting in clients being placed in externally commissioned beds costing more.

5.12 Short term services are £0.63m under spent due to the additional funding for Hospital Discharge and changes to some clients packages moving onto long term services.

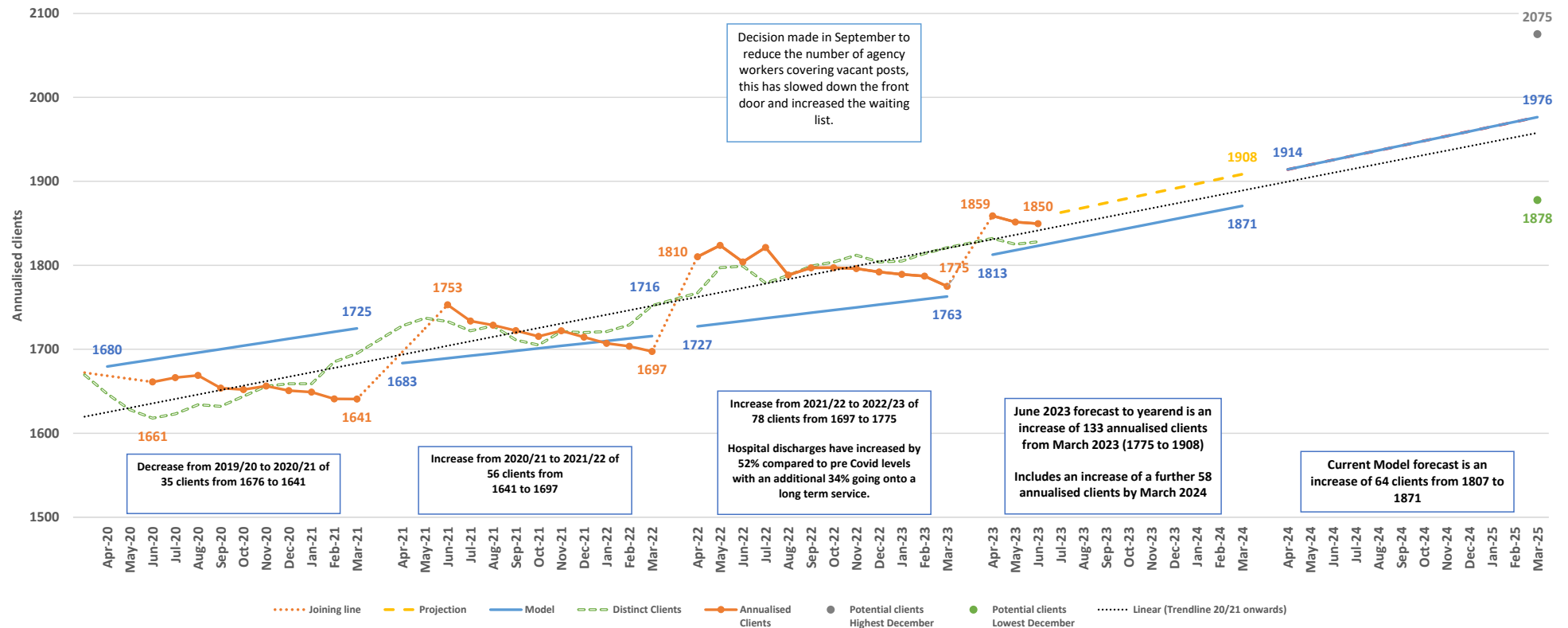
5.13 Other overspends is ASC total £1.1m.

- There is a £1.5m overspend in our own care homes due to a shortfall of income and agency staffing requirements from recruitment difficulties.
- Underspends have arisen in Shared Lives due to lack of carer availability and in Reablement due to vacancies.

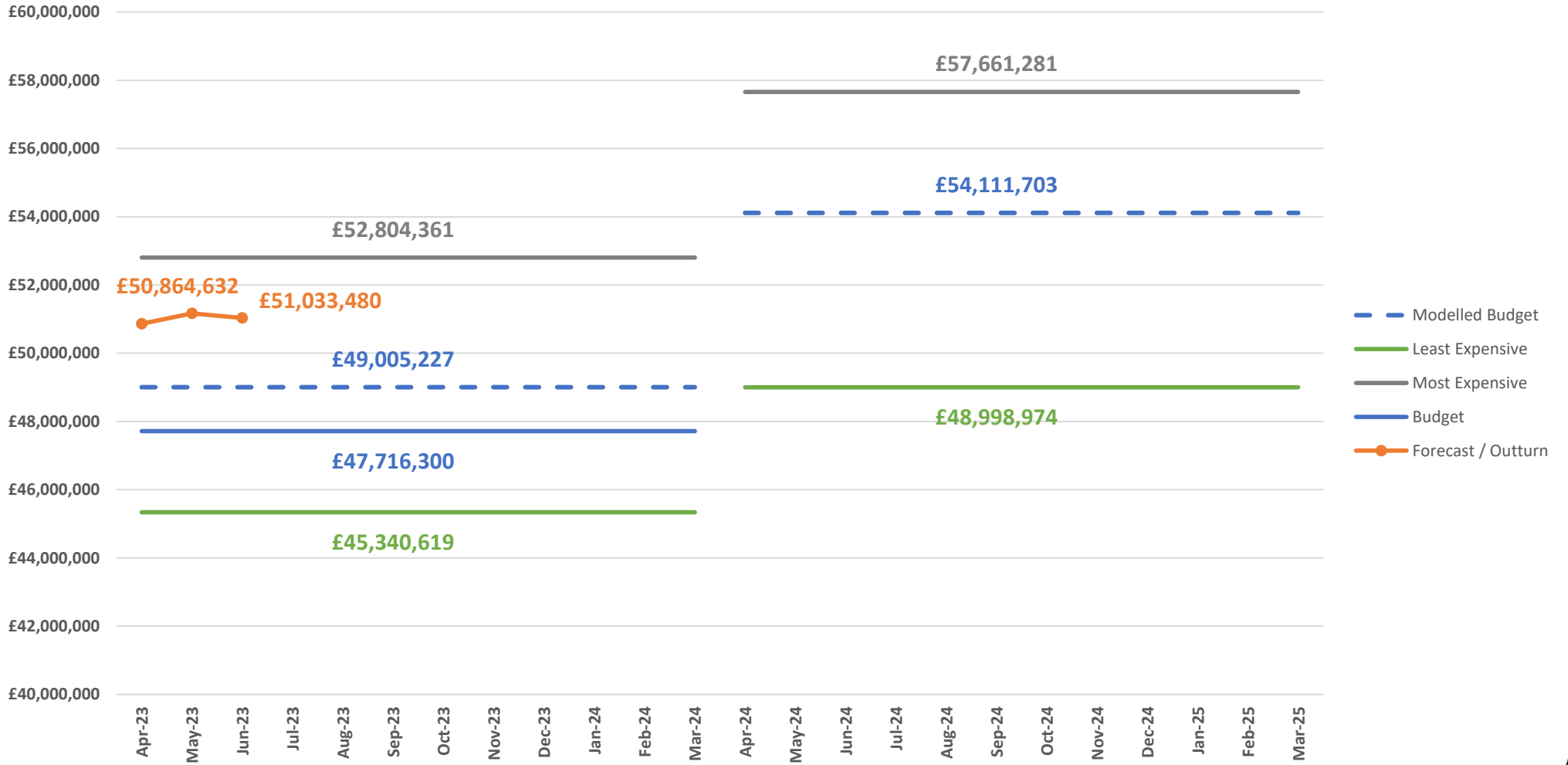
5.14 The 2023/24 savings target of £2.3m is £81k red, £1.6m amber and £0.6m green. The red is due to fee increases that require consultation before they can be implemented. The amber savings are on track to largely be achieved.

- 5.15 Mitigations of £2.1m are underway. Other actions include a review of 2024/25 savings proposals to see if they can be started early, stopping recruitment where possible, review of agency requirements, utilisation of external funding and a review of year end accruals. The service continues to take action to suppress market demand.
- 5.16 ASC are seeing an aging population as well as increased costs. The ASC Model for long term services is updated monthly, with assumptions reviewed and agreed by the ASC Financial Planning Steering group and reported at the ASC Financial Planning meeting.

Adult Social Care  
Annualised client numbers for Long Term Services



LTS Net Expenditure  
Model V Forecast



5.17 In CFS, the forecast is a £3.7m overspend, which is 17.5% of the net budget of £21m. This is after the use of Earmarked Reserves of £87k and £901k mitigations which are underway.

- There is a £2.5m over spend in placements before mitigation. The children in care population has increased by 20%. This is in addition to increased complexity, mental health and emotional wellbeing needs, and provision for teenagers. There is a small cohort of young people with very high care needs requiring specialist residential provision and a national shortage of suitable residential placements.
- There has been an 83% increase in child protection plans. The Family Safeguarding teams are overspending by £1.6m due to agency costs. This has been required to cover vacancies and maternity leave and increased demand. Childcare lawyers had a £0.7m overspend due to an increase in the number of cases in court.
- Mitigations of £0.9m relate to reducing the placement costs and agency spend.

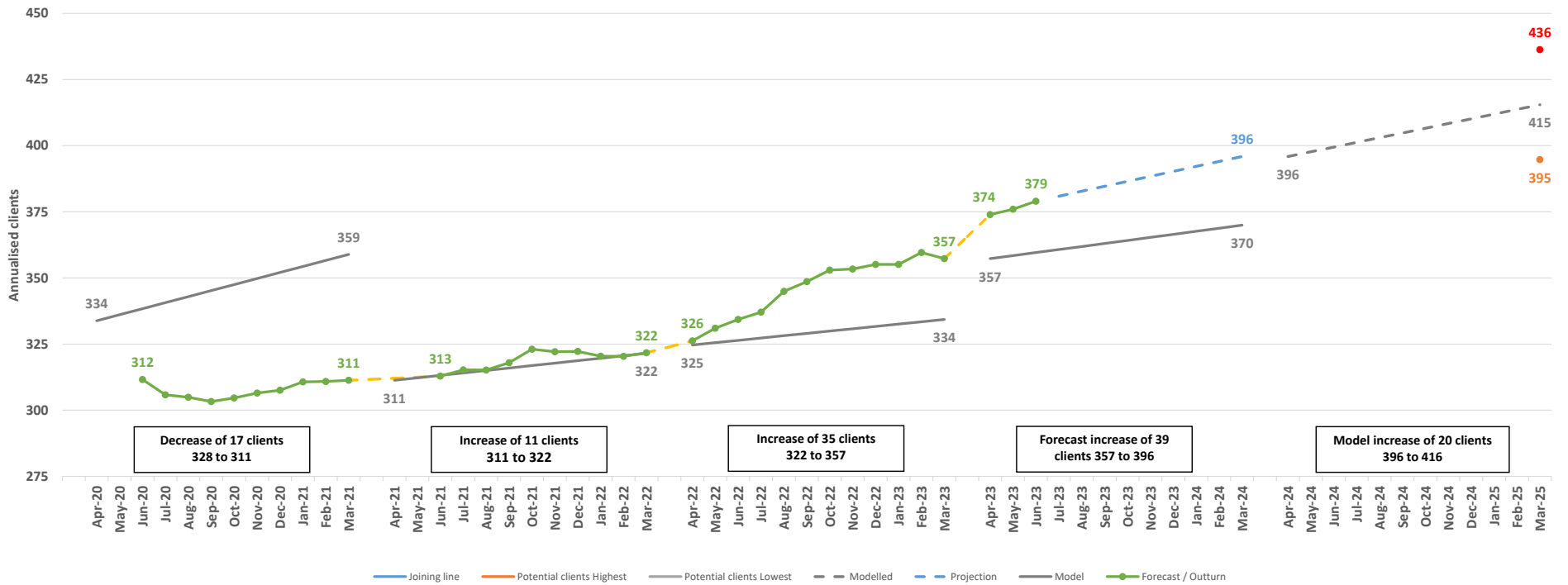
5.18 The 2023/24 savings target of £0.5m is £184k red, £154k amber and £196k green. The red is due to a target for not filling posts immediately upon becoming vacant not being met due to the level of demand for statutory intervention. The amber savings are for placement cost reductions which were planned at a point when a rise in the care population was not as great as now being seen.

5.19 The service continue to effectively manage placements as part of the Children and Family service Accommodation & Resources Panel. There is a robust plan in place for some children to appropriately safely step down from costly residential care. Additional in house supports to foster carers (fostering hub, mental health team) will enable increasing numbers of children to live in lower cost 'In house' placements.

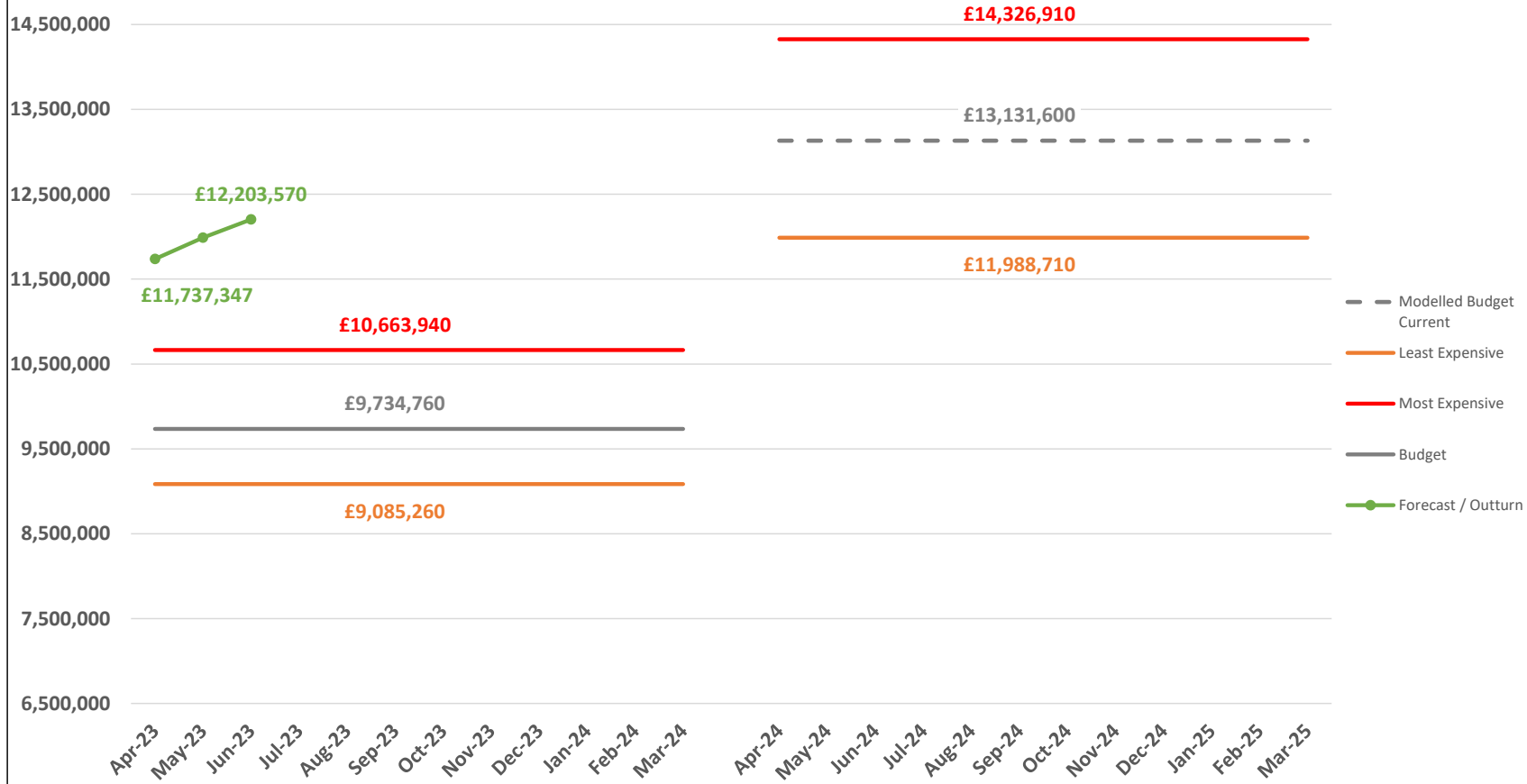
5.20 There is active recruitment taking place for qualified staff to fill vacancies. The national picture is one of acute shortage of social workers. The recruitment and retention package has been renewed.

5.21 The model for placements has been refined and is updated monthly. Client numbers and net expenditure are shown in the graphs below.

Children & Family Services annualised client numbers  
(includes UASC)



Children & Family Services Net Expenditure  
(includes UASC)





## 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One

5.22 Education forecast is a £1.3m overspend, which is 13% of the £10.7m budget. £1.1m of this is in Home to School Transport (HTST). The service is engaged in looking for ways to reduce HTST costs.

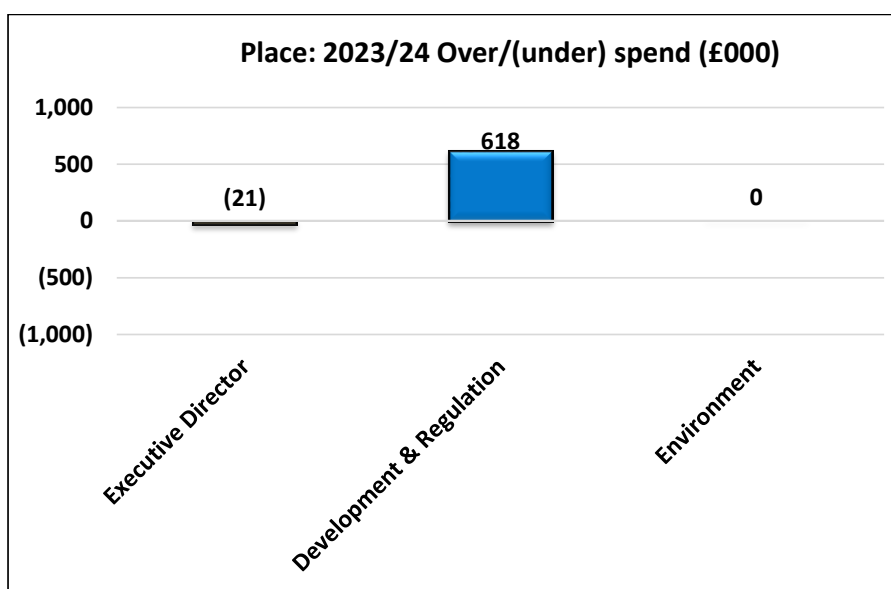
5.23 Other pressures are from agency costs and disability support packages residential.

5.24 Public Health forecast is a £143k underspend which will transfer to the Public Health Reserve at year end.

5.25 Communities and Wellbeing is reporting online. There are pressures in library income due to Parishes not contributing, but there are savings in leisure offsetting this.

### Place Directorate

5.26 The Place Directorate forecast is a £0.6m overspend, representing 1.8% against a budget of £34m. This is after use of reserves of £0.3m and mitigations of £0.3m. The overspend is entirely within Development and Regulation.



5.27 In Development and Regulation, the £0.6m overspend represents 11% of the £5.6m budget.

- There is a £0.6m pressure on Planning Application fee income, of which £0.4m is from a national fee uplift which was anticipated to start at the beginning of this financial year, but has yet to be introduced.
- There is a £0.3m pressure on Bio-Diversity Net Gain income, where income was expected to be generated through activity linked to developments delivering a 10% uplift in Bio-Diversity Net Gain. This is now expected to be introduced in November 2023 but there is no opportunity to generate income from the scheme.

5.28 The 2023/24 savings target of £1.5m is £0.9m red, £0.3m amber and £0.3m green. The red is due to the income targets outlined above not being achievable. The amber savings are for fees and charges increases and holding posts vacant.

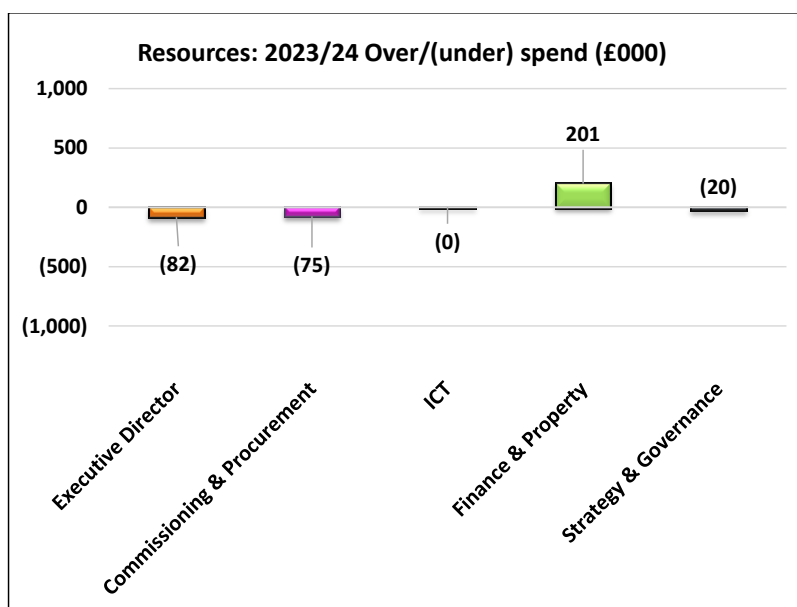
5.29 The implementation of the Planning Restructure should help realise some in year reductions to the current forecast. Activity to maximise income generation is being prioritised across the Planning Service. Further work is to be undertaken to review the utilisation of grant income to ensure all staff time for working on the projects is being captured, and funded from grant income.

5.30 In Environment, the forecast is online.

5.31 The 2023/24 savings target of £1.2m is £50k red, £30k amber and £1.1m green. The red is from biodiversity and carbon credits as legislation has not been forthcoming. The amber is for pre-application income.

**Resources Directorate/Chief Executive**

5.32 The Resources Directorate forecast is an overspend of £24k. This is after use of reserves of £0.4m and mitigations of £0.3m. The Chief Executive Service is an underspend of £5k. The combined forecast overspend of £19k represents 0.1% of the net budget of £12.7m.



5.33 In Commissioning & Procurement, the £75k surplus is largely due to income from the agency contract rebate, as a result of the increased agency usage. The £350k savings are forecast as green.

5.34 In ICT is forecast online. The £110k savings target is £35k amber and £75k green.

5.35 In Finance and Property, the £201k overspend has arisen from unachieved savings from the accommodation review project, delayed property disposals and recruitment difficulties necessitating the use of agency. The £1.1m savings target is £96k red, £50k amber and £1.1m green.

5.36 Strategy and Governance is £20k underspent. The £420k savings programme is £101k red, £50k amber and £269k green. The red is from grant funding that is not available.

5.37 The Transformation Service is forecast online after use of transformation funding.

5.38 Mitigations for overspends include review of vacant posts and agency arrangements, limiting printing and postage usage and review of vacant properties.

### **Capital Financing and Risk Management**

5.39 Capital Financing has an underspend of £157k. The position is the result of the Council seeking to mitigate interest rate risk through a strategy of not undertaking long term borrowing in respect of PWLB financing and, instead focusing on supporting delivery of the capital programme through short term borrowing and cash balances. The strategy of keeping borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, has reduced risk and helps keep interest costs low. The Investment and Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2023/24 has been set with the same underlying principles. The high interest rate environment has on a positive side yielded treasury returns on cash balances held by the authority. Capital financing is also dependant on the delivery of the Council's capital programme. The capital programme is currently forecasting a delivery level of approximately 83% with 16% of planned expenditure re-profiled into financial year 2024/25.

### **Employee and Agency Spend**

5.40 At Quarter One, total employee spend including agency was £17.7m against a budget of £17.1m, an overspend of £0.5m. The overspend is largely as a result of the use of agency in demand led services.

5.41 The chart shows the profiled budget to 30 June 2023. It should be noted that invoices will often be received in the month after the cost is incurred, so not all costs to date will be captured. Outstanding invoices are only accrued for at year end.

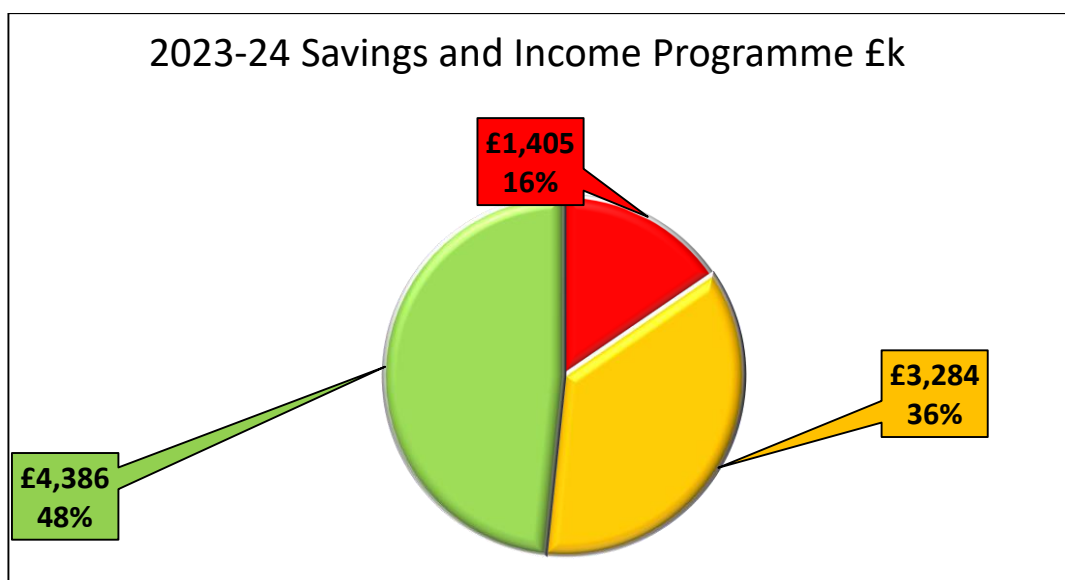
5.42 Within employee costs, agency spend to Quarter One was £2.6m. Agency is 15% as a percentage of employee budgets.

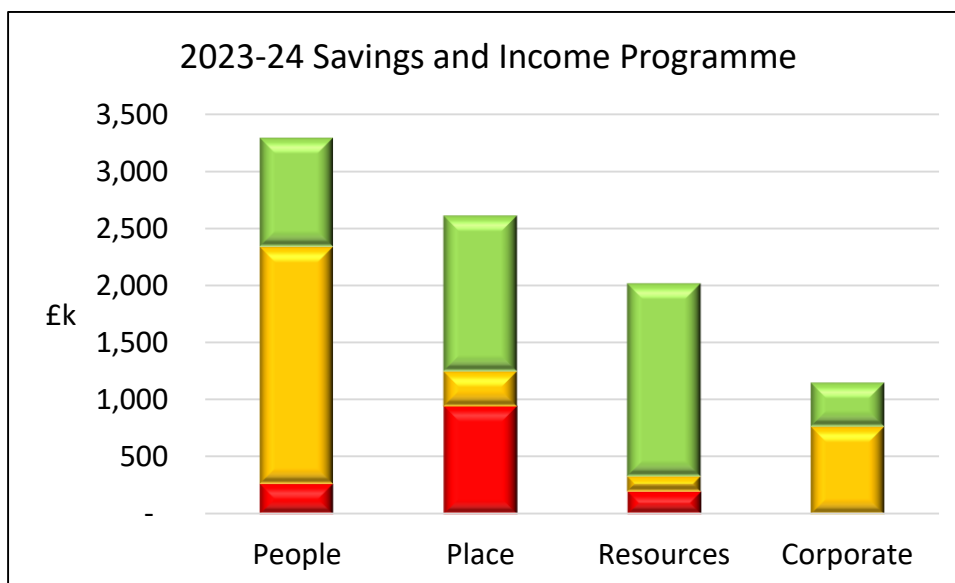
## 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One

Service	Employee Budget to Q1	Employee Spend to Q1 (including agency)	Over/ (under) spend	Agency spend to Q1	Agency spend as a % of Employee budgets
Chief Executive	123,530	141,004	17,474	-	-
Adult Social Care	4,514,875	4,900,972	386,097	1,101,964	24%
Children & Family Services	2,445,570	2,436,995	(8,575)	805,261	33%
Communities & Wellbeing	553,145	536,901	(16,244)	2,608	0%
Executive Director - People	79,853	66,534	(13,319)	-	0%
Education	1,677,708	1,773,103	95,396	230,573	14%
Public Health & Wellbeing	146,890	110,779	(36,111)	-	0%
Executive Director – Place	43,295	40,748	(2,547)	-	0%
Development & Regulation	2,436,410	2,536,378	99,968	269,596	11%
Environment	1,401,880	1,370,288	(31,592)	34,529	2%
Commissioning & Procurement	333,805	358,700	24,895	917	0%
Executive Director - Resources	48,808	40,161	(8,647)	-	0%
Finance & Property	1,143,690	1,197,445	53,755	103,186	9%
ICT	544,200	553,716	9,516	17,132	3%
Strategy & Governance	1,653,160	1,634,094	(19,066)	27,957	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,146,818</b>	<b>17,697,818</b>	<b>551,001</b>	<b>2,593,723</b>	<b>15%</b>

## 2023/24 Savings and income generation programme

5.43 In order to meet the funding available, the 2022/23 revenue budget was built with a £9m savings and income generation programme. The programme is monitored using the RAG traffic light system. The status is shown in the following charts:





Red items are as follows:

Service	Saving item	Impact on 2023/24
ASC	£81k fees and charges increase.	Unable to increase fees above 11.1% without consultation. Consultation recommended for setting of the fees for 2024/25.
CFS	£184k recruitment lag on new posts.	With the unprecedented level of demand for statutory intervention it is unsafe to not fill social work posts given the caseloads already exceeding safe levels.
D&R	£265k place shaping and delivery.	Income was originally expected to be generated through activity linked to Biodiversity Net Gain and Conservation Area Appraisals. The requirement for developments to deliver a 10% uplift in Biodiversity Net Gain is set to be introduced on 1 November 2023, however, it is now clear there is no opportunity to generate income other than through cost recovery through pre-apps and PPAs or by the sale of BNG credits. The sale of credits is represented by a £50k income target in the Environmental Delivery team
D&R	£63k premium service for pre application advice and determination of householder applications.	A trial of the Premium Service took place in October 2022. This service is currently not being offered, therefore the income target is not currently being realised.

D&R	£390k uplift in planning fees	Planning fees are set nationally. DLUHC carried out a consultation from February to April 23 regarding the increase but no announcement has been made on the timeline as to when higher fees could be introduced. Current Planning Fee income forecasts are based on them being introduced in Quarter 3.
D&R	£25k financial contribution from registered providers for use of Council's choice based letting system	There is currently a £55k income target for choice based lettings, of which only £26k is forecasted to be achieved. Currently there has not been the anticipated uptake in demand for providers to advertise through the letting system - this is linked with issues in the current demands on in the rental market.
D&R	£100k review of systems processes and resources	<p>This savings is linked with the implementation of the Planning Service Staffing Restructure which is due to go through consultation over the Summer with plans for it to be implemented later this year. Although there is an in year pressure on achieving this, once the new structure is implemented then the saving will be achieved for future years.</p> <p>In year there are posts being held vacant in Minerals &amp; Waste and Planning Policy which are helping offset / mitigate this pressure</p>
D&R	£50k planning white paper/levelling up and regeneration bill service efficiencies	<p>This savings is linked with the implementation of the Planning Service Staffing Restructure which is due to go through consultation over the Summer with plans for it to be implemented later this year. Although there is an in year pressure on achieving this, once the new structure is implemented then the saving will be achieved for future years.</p> <p>In year there are posts being held vacant in Minerals &amp; Waste and Planning Policy which are helping offset / mitigate this pressure</p>
Env	£50k for biodiversity and carbon credits	Q1 Forecast that income target will not be achieved.

F&P	£96k from savings on surplus accommodation	<p>At Q1 Budget Monitoring there is a forecasted pressure on West Street House as the property remains vacant, and is forecasted to remain vacant and in our possession for the remainder of the current year.</p> <p>An investment bid is to be put forward for 24/25 to reinstate the removed budget until the property is disposed or re-allocated for different use.</p>
S&G	£101k grant funding of elections staff	<p>There is no grant funding for the restructure of the Elections Team. An investment bid is to be submitted for 24/25 to adjust for this.</p>

**Expenditure Guidance from 24.7.23**

5.44 The Quarter One level of overspend means that we need to immediately introduce additional controls on all revenue spend within the Council. Agresso authorisation limits have been changed accordingly. Non Agresso systems will have alternative restrictions put in place.

5.45 Spending controls will need to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Any circumnavigation of the rules will be a disciplinary matter per the financial rules of procedure.

5.46 Spending controls will be overseen by the Financial Review Panel (FRP) consisting of the Chief Executive, Executive Director Resources, Service Director Transformation, Heads of Finance & Property, Legal and HR representatives plus the Leader, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance.

**Measures for All Services**

5.47 All services will need to do the following:

- (a) All spend up to £500 to be approved by Service Director/Head of Service, and only to be approved if statutory or unavoidable.
- (b) Spend between £501 and £1000 to be approved by Executive Director, and only to be approved if statutory or unavoidable.
- (c) Spend over £1000 to go to Spending Review Panel (SRP) members to approve. The SRP consists of Chief Executive, Executive Director Resources and the Heads of Finance & Property.
- (d) Recruitment pause with exceptions submitted for consideration by the FRP. Any jobs currently out to advert will be reviewed by the FRP to consider whether recruitment should proceed.

- (e) Reduction in the use of agency staff. All current agency to be reviewed and terminated where possible. Any new agency requests to continue to use the current request forms, but these will come to FRP for approval.
- (f) Overtime to be stopped, and only paid if approved in advance by the FRP with a supporting business case.
- (g) Review of honorariums. These should cease unless linked to specific acting up arrangements.
- (h) All job re-evaluations for existing roles will cease (unless the request forms part of a department restructure or is directly linked to a savings proposal).

5.48 All services to attend an FRP to review the following:

- (a) Statutory/discretionary areas of spend.
- (b) Unachieved savings and mitigation plans.

### **Measures for Overspending Services**

- (c) Spend over £1000 to be approved by the FRP from the week commencing 24<sup>th</sup> July. Purchase orders over £1000 will need to have an Expenditure Request Form emailed to the FRP in order to be approved (see attached).
- (d) The FRP will review every Thursday morning:
  - Purchase Orders (POs) and other expenditure requests approved in the preceding week by Service.
  - Expenditure Request Forms for outstanding POs over £1000.
- (e) A recovery plan will be required to demonstrate the action being taken to deliver a breakeven position by year end.

### **Allowable expenditure**

5.49 We will continue to spend on the following:

- Existing staff payroll and pension costs
- Goods and services that have already been received
- Provision of statutory services at a minimum possible level
- Urgent need to safeguard vulnerable citizens
- Existing legal agreements and contracts where the spend is within the agreed and existing budget AND the spend is necessary to meet a statutory service OR a contractual obligation.



- Areas funded by ring-fenced grants (although these will need to be reviewed to ascertain where these are being fully utilised to cover costs/rebadging of expenditure).

### **Actions Underway**

- 5.50 Finance Service to review 2022/23 year end accruals and make recommendations about the accrual policy for 2023/24.
- 5.51 Minimum Revenue Provision review: the Council's external treasury advisors have been commissioned to review the MRP policy. The Finance Service are leading on this.
- 5.52 Review of the opportunities for the flexible use of capital receipts funded through the sale of assets; the Council has little funding left for further transformational activity via the flexible use of capital receipts, though the opportunity to fund a range of work at the Council is there if asset sales occur e.g. digital, projects teams etc
- 5.53 The S151 Officer has contacted DLUHC for an informal discussion setting out the financial position.

### **Proposals**

- 5.54 To note the £6.3m overspend.
- 5.55 To note the implementation of measures included in the report around recruitment, staffing and agency.
- 5.56 To note the establishment of a Financial Review Panel (FRP) to meet weekly to ensure the spending limits are being adhered to.

## **6 Other options considered**

- 6.1 None

## **7 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Council is facing an unprecedented level of financial pressures due a range of factors. The Council is taking proactive steps to reduce this expenditure as highlighted in this report, but the Quarter One position is placing a significant pressure on the Council's financial resilience. This position will be monitored very closely in the coming days, weeks and months to measure progress on reducing expenditure whilst mitigating the impact on frontline services.

## **8 Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix A – Quarter One position
- 8.2 Appendix B – Budget Changes

**Subject to Call-In:**

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

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	Budget				Forecasted Performance										
	Original Budget 2023/24 £	Changes in year 2023/24 £	Funding Released from Reserves 2023/24 £	Revised Budget 2023/24 £	Expenditure			Income			Net				
					Annual Expenditure Budget for 2023/24 £	Annual Expenditure Forecast for 2023/24 £	Expenditure Variance for 2023/24 £	Annual Income Budget for 2023/24 £	Annual Income Forecast for 2023/24 £	Income Variance for 2023/24 £	Net Variance £	Use of Earmarked Reserves £	Mitigation £	Year end forecast variance £	Net Exp/Inc after adjustments £
Adult Social Care	62,898,690	26,090	0	62,924,780	85,225,890	90,795,540	5,569,650	-22,301,110	-24,849,490	-2,548,380	3,021,270	-151,480	-2,079,000	790,790	63,715,570
Children & Family Services	21,222,570	26,090	0	21,248,660	24,181,650	29,148,160	4,966,510	-2,932,990	-3,190,160	-257,170	4,709,340	-87,000	-901,000	3,721,340	24,970,000
Executive Director - People	369,810	0	0	369,810	369,810	376,590	6,780	0	0	0	6,780			6,780	376,590
Education (DSG Funded)	-444,000	0	0	-444,000	126,348,550	129,564,030	3,215,480	-126,792,550	-130,008,030	-3,215,480	0			0	-444,000
Education	10,687,990	0	20,000	10,707,990	14,756,930	15,852,540	1,095,610	-4,048,940	-3,794,000	254,940	1,350,550		-30,000	1,320,550	12,028,540
Public Health & Wellbeing	-80,000	0	0	-80,000	6,448,470	6,093,470	-355,000	6,448,470	-6,173,470	355,000	0			0	-80,000
Communities & Wellbeing	3,256,850	0	0	3,256,850	4,641,800	4,513,850	-127,950	-1,384,950	-1,257,000	127,950	0			0	3,256,850
<b>People</b>	<b>97,911,910</b>	<b>52,180</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>97,984,090</b>	<b>261,973,100</b>	<b>276,344,180</b>	<b>14,371,080</b>	<b>-163,989,010</b>	<b>-169,272,150</b>	<b>-5,283,140</b>	<b>9,087,940</b>	<b>-238,480</b>	<b>-3,010,000</b>	<b>5,839,460</b>	<b>103,823,550</b>
Development & Regulation	5,343,890	0	293,520	5,637,410	13,201,600	16,108,860	2,907,260	-7,564,190	-9,517,450	-1,953,260	954,000	-26,000	-310,000	618,000	6,255,410
Executive Director – Place	213,130	0	0	213,130	213,130	197,350	-15,780	0	0	0	-15,780		-5,000	-20,780	192,350
Environment	27,942,440	-60,000	0	27,882,440	38,852,350	38,909,010	56,660	-10,969,910	-10,764,570	205,340	262,000	-262,000		0	27,882,440
<b>Place</b>	<b>33,499,460</b>	<b>-60,000</b>	<b>293,520</b>	<b>33,732,980</b>	<b>52,267,080</b>	<b>55,215,220</b>	<b>2,948,140</b>	<b>-18,534,100</b>	<b>-20,282,020</b>	<b>-1,747,920</b>	<b>1,200,220</b>	<b>-288,000</b>	<b>-315,000</b>	<b>597,220</b>	<b>34,330,200</b>
ICT	2,436,570	0	0	2,436,570	3,169,610	3,186,400	16,790	-733,040	-662,280	70,760	87,550	-22,600	-64,950	0	2,436,570
Executive Director - Resources	317,170	0	0	317,170	317,170	314,190	-2,980	0	-38,700	-38,700	-41,680		-40,000	-81,680	235,490
Commissioning & Procurement	448,480	0	0	448,480	14,529,810	15,034,870	505,060	-14,081,330	-14,509,000	-427,670	77,390	-142,810	-10,000	-75,420	373,060
Finance & Property	1,468,220	0	0	1,468,220	33,264,520	33,525,480	260,960	-31,796,300	-31,774,310	21,990	282,950		-82,000	200,950	1,669,170
Strategy & Governance	7,288,880	7,820	191,910	7,488,610	8,551,810	9,131,110	579,300	-1,063,200	-1,445,360	-382,160	197,140	-121,200	-95,910	-19,970	7,468,640
Transformation	0	0	0	0	0	102,620	102,620	0	0	0	102,620	-102,620		0	0
<b>Resources</b>	<b>11,959,320</b>	<b>7,820</b>	<b>191,910</b>	<b>12,159,050</b>	<b>59,832,920</b>	<b>61,294,670</b>	<b>1,461,750</b>	<b>-47,673,870</b>	<b>-48,429,650</b>	<b>-755,780</b>	<b>705,970</b>	<b>-389,230</b>	<b>-292,860</b>	<b>23,880</b>	<b>12,182,930</b>
Chief Executive	540,710	0	0	540,710	540,710	535,710	-5,000	0	0	0	-5,000			-5,000	535,710
<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>540,710</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>540,710</b>	<b>540,710</b>	<b>535,710</b>	<b>-5,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-5,000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-5,000</b>	<b>535,710</b>
Capital Financing and Management	14,850,640	0	-313,520	14,537,120	15,047,120	15,099,910	52,790	-510,000	-719,770	-209,770	-156,980	0	0	-156,980	14,380,140
<b>Total</b>	<b>158,762,040</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>191,910</b>	<b>158,953,950</b>	<b>389,660,930</b>	<b>408,489,690</b>	<b>18,828,760</b>	<b>-230,706,980</b>	<b>-238,703,590</b>	<b>-7,996,610</b>	<b>10,832,150</b>	<b>-915,710</b>	<b>-3,617,860</b>	<b>6,298,580</b>	<b>165,252,530</b>

Service	Original Net Budget	Budget B/F from 22-23 released from reserves	Grants/ funding released from reserves	FAGG approved release from reserves	Budget changes not requiring approval	Approved by S151 & Portfolio Holder	Approved by Executive	Budget C/F to 2023-24	Final Net Budget
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Adult Social Care	62,899				26				62,925
Children and Family Services	21,223				26				21,249
Executive Director	370								370
Education DSG funded	(444)								(444)
Education	10,688	20							10,708
Public Health & Wellbeing	(80)								(80)
Communities & Wellbeing	3,246								3,246
<b>People</b>	<b>97,901</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>97,973</b>
Executive Director	213								213
Development & Regulation	5,344	294							5,637
Environment	27,942				(60)				27,882
<b>Place</b>	<b>33,499</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(60)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33,733</b>
ICT	2,437								2,437
Executive Director	317								317
Commissioning & Procurement	448								448
Finance & Property	1,479								1,479
Strategy & Governance	7,289	192			8				7,489
<b>Resources</b>	<b>11,970</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12,170</b>
<b>Chief Executive</b>	<b>541</b>								<b>541</b>
<b>Capital Financing &amp; Risk</b>	<b>14,851</b>	<b>(314)</b>							<b>14,537</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>158,762</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>158,954</b>

# Corporate Transformation Programme 2023-2025

<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Jeff Brooks
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	17 August 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Gabrielle Mancini, Service Director-Transformation
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4448

## 1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The Council established a new Service Director- Transformation post to lead on developing a new Corporate Transformation Programme for the Council in March 2023. The purpose of this paper is to give details of the projects to be included within this Programme over the coming two years, which will be a key workstream in the Council’s efforts to ensure it delivers sustainable, efficient and customer focussed public services.

## 2 Recommendation

2.1 To note the report, which will be the first in a series of updates on the delivery of the programme.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>It is likely that delivery of the programme will have resourcing requirements, however these will be more than offset by the financial savings delivered by the programme.</p> <p>Individual projects within the programme are likely to have financial implications due to their strategic nature and pan-organisational reach. There will be Finance representation on individual project boards and the Section 151 Officer will have oversight of the wider Programme through line management of the Service Director- Transformation and through Corporate Board.</p>

<b>Human Resource:</b>	Individual projects within the programme are likely to have HR implications due to their strategic nature and pan-organisational reach. HR will be represented on individual project boards where this is the case in order to monitor impact.			
<b>Legal:</b>	Individual projects within the programme are likely to have legal implications due to their strategic nature and pan-organisational reach. There will be Legal representation on individual project boards and the Monitoring Officer will have oversight of the wider Programme through Corporate Board.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>It is likely that there will be risks associated with all of the projects, which will be monitored and managed through detailed, maintained risk registers and stringent project management.</p> <p>There is a risk that the Programme will not be successful in delivering the anticipated benefits if it does not receive the necessary corporate commitment or resource. This should be mitigated by robust oversight and ownership from Corporate Board and the Executive.</p>			
<b>Property:</b>	One of the proposed projects within the programme relates to the strategic management of the Council’s estate so it is likely that there will be significant property impact, although it is not yet possible to calculate this without conducting further analysis.			
<b>Policy:</b>	No, although the content of the Programme has been produced in direct response to the strategic objectives of the administration and the emerging financial position of the Council.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				

<p><b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p>		x		<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme.</p>
<p><b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p>		x		<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme.</p>
<p><b>Environmental Impact:</b></p>	X			<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme, but some of these have significant environmental enhancements e.g. asset review.</p>
<p><b>Health Impact:</b></p>		x		<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme.</p>
<p><b>ICT Impact:</b></p>		x		<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme, although it is likely that significant IT implications which will be monitored through Resources Prioritisation Board.</p>
<p><b>Digital Services Impact:</b></p>		x		<p>This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme, although it is likely that significant Digital implications which will be monitored through Resources Prioritisation Board.</p>
<p><b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b></p>	x			<p>It is likely that all of the projects within the Programme will have a positive impact on the delivery of the emerging Council Strategy's priorities as they have been developed in order to do precisely that.</p>

<b>Core Business:</b>	x			It is likely that all of the projects within the Programme will have a positive impact on the delivery of the Council's core business as they have been developed in order to do precisely that.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		This will need to be assessed for each individual project contained within the Programme.
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Executive Member- Transformation and Governance Chief Executive All Executive Directors Corporate Management Team Service Lead- HR Digital Services Manager Performance, Research & Consultation Manager Culture & Libraries Manager Building Communities Together Team Manager			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Transformation Programme is to be based around six key projects; business support review, Strategic Asset and Locality Service Delivery Model Review, Place Service Improvement Plan, Corporate Review of Recruitment, Review of Care Home Provision and Review of Home to School Transport.
- 4.2 In March 2023, plans to recruit a new Service Director- Transformation for a two-year fixed period were approved at Full Council to facilitate the delivery of a pan-organisational change programme. This programme would enable the Council to deliver its services in the most efficient, cost effective way and to improve the experience of its customers. Key to these plans was the overarching principle that the content of this programme should be in addition to existing transformational activity being undertaken through the Council's Corporate Programme and that it should have a wider impact made possible by the additional strategic capacity provided by the new Service Director.
- 4.3 Following an internal recruitment process, this new role was recruited to, and the new Service Director started in post in late June 2023. The Service Director then began to undertake research and evidence-gathering in order to develop a long list of projects which might be included in the final Corporate Transformation Programme. This long



list was then reviewed by the Service Director- Transformation, the Executive Director- Resources and the Executive Member for Transformation and Governance before being prioritised based on the potential to impact on the following:

- Delivery of the objectives of the emerging Council Strategy 2023-27
- Improvement of customer experience
- Creation of capacity and maximisation of efficiencies
- Generation of income or capital receipts

4.4 Following this process, it was agreed that the programme should comprise two large corporate projects and four smaller service-based projects. The following projects are therefore proposed for inclusion:

- Business Support Review- *Consolidation and automation of manual and administrative functions into a central business support unit*
- Strategic Asset and Locality Service Delivery Model Review- *Rationalisation of corporate buildings and co-location of Council Services*
- Place Service Improvement Plan- *Implementation of a Service Improvement Plan to improve efficiency and customer satisfaction in the Council's Planning Service*
- Corporate Review of Recruitment- *considering ways to improve our recruitment processes whilst reducing agency costs*
- Review of Care Home Provision- *Development of in-depth business case for the future role of the Council in local residential care provision*
- Review of Home to School Transport- *Review of the service delivery model for home to school transport to identify efficiencies*

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

5.1 Following a wide-ranging data collection exercise, a proposed Corporate Transformation Programme has been compiled. The following sections and supporting appendices give details of how these were identified and the anticipated benefits they would provide.

### Background

5.2 The content of the proposed Corporate Transformation Programme has been developed using a wide range of information and inputs including:

- Regular Portfolio Holder meetings with the Executive Member for Transformation and Governance
- The Council's budget monitoring reports
- Detailed individual interviews with senior officers
- The evidence base for the emerging Council Strategy 2023-27
- The output of the most recent Residents Survey
- Benchmarking spend and performance data from similar local authorities

5.3 This has enabled the Service Director- Transformation to develop first a long list of potential projects for inclusion in the Corporate Transformation Programme before finalising a proposed shortlist. The section below gives a brief overview of why each of the six projects selected for inclusion have been chosen.

### *Business Support Review*

Business Support, also known as administrative services, is fundamental to supporting the delivery of our back-office and front-line services. The Council's current model of providing these services, which sees them undertaken within individual service areas, has led to an uneven position whereby some services have little to no administrative support while others have multiple officers providing such a function, albeit with different job descriptions despite commonality of duties. This can lead to both gaps in resource and duplication of effort as well as diminished resilience, poor organisational understanding among officers, silo working and a lack of flexibility.

It is proposed that these functions should be absorbed into a central business support function based on the nature of duties and volume of transactions being carried out rather than the service area being supported. This should maximise the use of existing skills and capacity within the organisation, realise efficiencies, build resilience, and make use of new and existing digital technologies to standardise our way of working.

Comparable authorities have undertaken reviews of this nature and have been able to realise significant resourcing savings through minimising the use of temporary staff and deleting vacant posts due to enhanced efficiency. They have also seen improvements in customer experience for both internal and external customers as transactions and processes are performed more quickly and with a greater accuracy.

Should this concept of this review have merit, it is considered that its operating principles whereby similar functions are identified and consistently centralised. Examples of relevant professional disciplines in this regard include Communications, Legal and Web Development.

### *Accommodation and Locality Working Review*

As a unitary authority operating across a large geographical area, West Berkshire Council delivers almost 800 services to its residents. Although many of these are delivered within the community, the Council delivers services in a wide variety of corporate buildings as well as 8 libraries and over 50 schools. Its main corporate office at Market Street is reaching the end of its useful life and the buildings it formerly inhabited in Newbury Town Centre have been vacated as part of the Timelord 2 project. The Council's most recent LGA Peer Review suggested the Council should take a stronger place leadership role, which could include making better use of its estate to drive regeneration, and the Council also has clear objectives to become carbon neutral by 2030. The impact of the pandemic has shifted the way in which customers wish to receive Council services with current data suggesting that most customers wish to, and do, access services online and decreased customer footfall to corporate offices. That said, it is important to maintain a universal service offering for all customers, regardless of how they choose to access services.

It is proposed that a fundamental review of the Council's accommodation needs and the way in which it delivers face-to-face services is undertaken with the aim of developing a value-for-money solution that enables the Council to realise capital receipts, operate more efficiently, co-locate with other public sector partners, minimise the carbon impact of its operations and continue to provide a good level of customer service to all residents and businesses across a smaller footprint.

### *Place Service Improvement Plan*

Improving customer service and the way in which the Council engages the community through its Planning Service is a clear priority of the new administration. A significant review of the service has already been undertaken and several opportunities for improvement have already been identified. The Council has also recently been awarded funding to implement digital improvements to its Planning Service, so it is suggested there is significant potential to enhance the customer experience, make best use of automation and realise efficiencies.

It is suggested that drawing together these existing opportunities and this new investment under the strategic umbrella of the Corporate Transformation Programme will provide the necessary oversight and momentum to ensure their benefits are fully realised for both the Council and its customers.

### *Corporate Review of Recruitment*

The Council's HR Service has undergone significant changes since it became part of the Strategy & Governance department in 2021 under a new Service Lead. This has included improvements to policies and processes, the adoption of a Behaviour Framework, the addition of a Wellbeing Officer and the procurement of a new HR and Payroll System; all of which have been well-received by the organisation.

In recent years, the Council has relied heavily on agency staff which can represent poor value for money and instability within the establishment. At present, approximately 207 roles are fulfilled by temporary workers, representing circa 14% of the establishment and a revenue cost of circa £9.5m.

It is considered that a review of the Council's recruitment processes, with more strategic oversight located within the HR Service, better use of automation and an improved Employer Value Proposition, could represent better value for money and employee experience. It is for this reason that it should be included in the Corporate Transformation Programme.

### *Review of Care Home Provision*

The Council is one of a number of local authorities nationally which maintains its own older people care homes. It currently operates 3 care homes with a total of 115 beds. This represents 17% of the local older people residential care market. These homes are currently at 75 % capacity and cost over £8m in revenue each year with further capital funding aside for building and maintenance works over the lifetime of the medium-term financial strategy.

The Adult Social Care Department is currently undertaking a strategic review of the care market and this includes a review of its options and how the Council wishes to deliver residential care going forward. This review is to be undertaken from an agnostic position to allow for all provision models to be considered and for the best, most value-for-money future operating model to be proposed and subsequently adopted.

### *Home to School Transport*

West Berkshire Council provides home to school transport for almost 2000 local young people at a revenue cost of over £3m each year. Whilst a small percentage of this provision is undertaken in house and by schools, the vast majority of it is contracted out to external companies.

After analysis suggested that the Council was an outlier in terms of level of spend, a consultant was appointed to undertake a review of the service to identify opportunities to realise efficiencies. The consultant in question has now produced a report detailing avenues for consideration and it is recommended that the ongoing work relating to the review is placed within the Corporate Transformation Programme to ensure it has a high profile and that its benefits are realised.

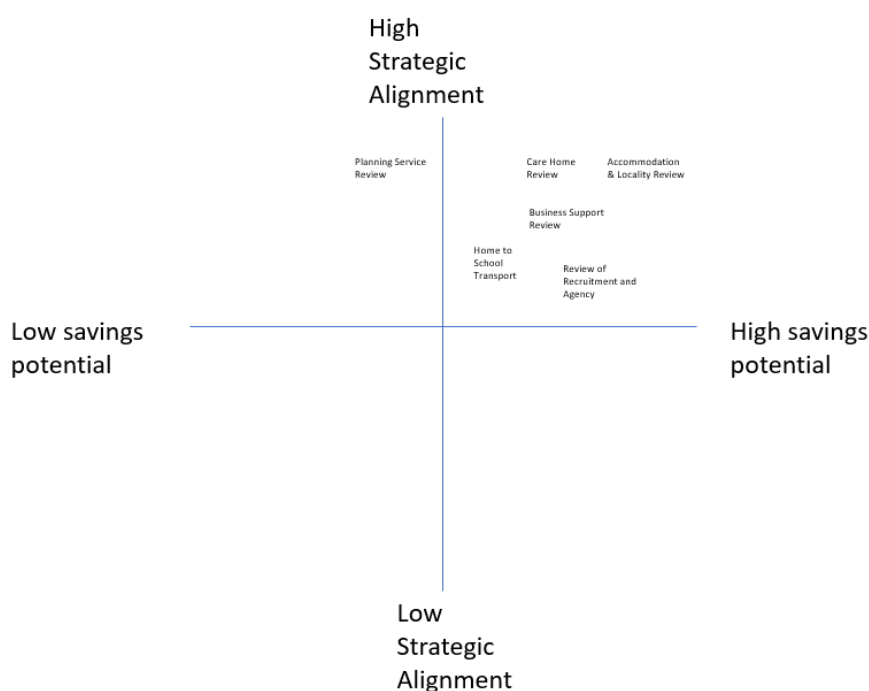


Figure 1: Matrix demonstrating the benefits of the projects proposed for inclusion in the Corporate Transformation Programme.

### Proposals

5.4 It is proposed that the following projects should be endorsed for inclusion in the Corporate Transformation Programme in light of their significant potential impact on the organisation’s finances, the experience of its customers and the successful delivery of its strategic priorities:

- Business Support Review
- Strategic Asset and Locality Service Delivery Model Review
- Place Service Improvement Plan
- Corporate Review of Recruitment
- Review of Care Home Provision
- Review of Home to School Transport

5.5 It is proposed that Executive should receive quarterly reports regarding the progress made on the projects contained within the programme.

## 6 Other options considered

6.1 A number of other projects were considered for inclusion within the Corporate Transformation Programme. However, they were discounted as they did not align with the administration's priorities and organisational need to the same degree as those which have been included.

6.2 Doing nothing is an option but this is not recommended given the proposed programme's clear links to the Council's strategic objectives and need to address its budgetary position.

## 7 Conclusion

7.1 The importance of implementing a wide-ranging, impactful Corporate Transformation Programme has been agreed by Full Council. In doing so, the Council will ensure it is able to deliver its services in the most efficient way whilst also improving the experience of its customers.

7.2 The projects proposed for inclusion in the programme as outlined in this report have the potential to realise significant benefits for the authority, so it is recommended that Executive notes this paper and agrees to receive regular reports on the progress being made on delivering the programme.

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### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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# Results of Public Consultation – Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park

<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Janine Lewis
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	7 September 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Paul Martindill
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4434

## 1 Purpose of the Report

To report on the results of the public consultation in relation to the potential creation of a grass sports pitch at Manor Park, and to determine whether the proposed sports pitch should be progressed for a planning application.

To set out the potential implications of not developing the sports pitch at this location within the context of the Newbury Sports Hub and Playing Pitch Strategy.

## 2 Recommendation

Not to progress with a planning application for the creation of a sports pitch at the Manor Park site and to explore alternative locations for the creation of new sports pitches.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	The cost estimate in 2022 for the sports pitch is £382k- £409k. Applying an additional 10% for inflation is advisable based on 2023 market conditions. Cessation of the project would enable the budget to be allocated to alternative priorities with the Playing Pitch Strategy. Additional costs for the toilet block are estimated at £30-£60k and further budget contingency will be required if unforeseen measures are required to protect the oil pipe work beneath Manor Park, increasing the car park capacity, or the movement of the locally equipped play area to an alternative location on the site.

**Results of Public Consultation – Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park**

	<p>The cost of creating a grass sports pitch is always dependent on the specification and local ground conditions. In seeking cost comparisons a range of £50,000-£350,000 represent the usual range. The cost at Manor Park exceeds this in large part due to the requirement for substantial soil importation (13,000 cubic square metres) to address a 7 metre gradient that runs across the site and the requirement for a comprehensive pitch drainage system to prevent water logging due to the nature of the soil quality. Progressing the development of the sports pitch is therefore very high cost and does not represent good value for money.</p>
<p><b>Human Resource:</b></p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p>	<p>In light of the clear recommendation not to proceed with the full planning application and construction at the Manor Park site, there are no legal implications with regard to planning, procurement or the main property. It is noted that the land on which the car park is currently situated should be transferred to the Council for no monetary value (although this will require officer resource) within the terms of the original Section 52 Agreement and on the same terms as were applicable to the 2002 transfer to WBC of the existing Manor Park open space. Accordingly, it is likely that the officers will proceed with that transfer.</p> <p>Dawn Bond – 27 July 2023</p> <p>Sarah House - 27 July 2023</p>
<p><b>Risk Management:</b></p>	<p>The site has a number of physical and environmental challenges, all of which can be addressed but will add considerable cost to the creation of a grass sports pitch. An assessment of the value for money in progressing the development mitigates against pursuing the proposal for a full planning application.</p> <p>Further, the public consultation demonstrated that there is considerable opposition, with local residents strongly disagreeing with the proposal to submit the project for full planning application.</p>
<p><b>Property:</b></p>	<p>A Section 106 agreement has secured the provision of a Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) via an adjacent housing development. If the sports pitch was developed the LEAP</p>



**Results of Public Consultation – Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park**

	would need to be relocated from the north end to the south end of the Manor Park.			
<b>Policy:</b>	The Playing Pitch Strategy has identified a need for more grass and artificial sports pitches to meet growing demand, especially for football, where team numbers have grown significantly in the last 4 years			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				N/A
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				N/A
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>				A baseline UK habitat classification survey was undertaken. The site was noted to have good ecological elements with many natural species of trees and wildlife habitats currently present.

<b>Health Impact:</b>				<p>The provision of a grass sports pitch will increase opportunities for participation in team sports for adults and children and, thereby, contribute to improving the physical and mental health of participants.</p> <p>However, there are also benefits to maintaining the area as public open space for activities such as dog walking and play.</p>
<b>ICT Impact:</b>				N/A
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>				N/A
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>				<p>As set out in the Playing Pitch Strategy, there is a requirement for a greater number of sports pitches and a need to increase the number of sports pitches across West Berkshire to meet growing demand.</p>
<b>Core Business:</b>				N/A
<b>Data Impact:</b>				N/A
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>A public consultation was conducted between 27 April 2022 and 26 June 2022 that received 430 responses. Of these, 92% were from individuals, with the remaining responses received from local football clubs, parish council and local leagues.</p>			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The report is brought to consider the results of a public consultation relating to the potential development of a sports pitch at Manor Park. The report also summarises the challenges of creating a sports pitch at this location.
- 4.2 Manor Park is 2.119 hectares in size and consists of grass land with mature tree boundaries. A housing estate is located to the east of the site.
- 4.3 A feasibility study undertaken by the Sports Turf Research Institute confirmed that the site could accommodate a sports pitch of the dimensions 94m x 70m.
- 4.4 The public consultation was undertaken between 27 April and 26 June 2022. A webinar was also conducted to address a range of public questions.

## Results of Public Consultation – Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park

- 4.5 A total of 430 responses were received, of which 92% were from individual local residents. A total of six responses came from local football clubs and leagues.
- 4.6 The results showed that 50.5% of those that responded, strongly disagreed with the proposal to develop a sports pitch, and 9% disagreed. In contrast, 21% strongly agreed and 13.75% agreed with the proposal. The remaining responses were neutral towards the proposal, with a number of respondents not responding to this question.
- 4.7 The primary concerns raised were:
- Loss of quiet green rural space and impact on wildlife habitat
  - Cost of the project
  - Increased traffic, parking and noise
  - Increased risk of anti-social behaviour
  - Incompatibility with dog walking
- 4.8 There was significant support from local football clubs including Thatcham Town Harriers, Thatcham Tornados, AFC Newbury, Newbury Sunday League, Football Fun Factory and a local youth football team.
- 4.9 The feasibility study showed a number of site-specific challenges that would make the development of the sports pitch expensive, with a cost estimate of £410k without essential ancillary facilities. This cost is considerably higher than the normal cost range for a sports pitch. The primary limiting factors are:
- The site has a pronounced diagonal fall from the north-west corner to the south-east corner and would require the import of a substantial amount of soil material (13,353 cubic metres) to level the site, adding £130k-£150k to the cost of the pitch.
  - An oil pipeline runs across the north end of the site and would require 750mm of cover if pitch construction takes place.
  - Poor topsoil would require the pitch to be installed with a drainage system and soakaway.
  - There are no toilet facilities on the site.
  - Parking capacity would need to be increased.
- 4.10 A grass pitch has limited capacity, with usage levels recommended at around three matches per week (4 hours), with 50% enhancement to this capacity if the pitch is used by children aged 15 or under.
- 4.11 In consideration of the public consultation results, the site challenges with the resulting high cost of development and the fairly limited level of usage that will be achieved, it is not recommended to progress with the proposal for a formal planning application.
- 4.12 New opportunities are emerging and better value may be achieved by the development of new artificial pitches, which have significantly greater capacity to meet the growing demand in the area.
- 4.13 The public consultation results showed significant support for the principle of provision of additional sports pitches within West Berkshire (see appendix A) and work is progressing, to explore alternative sites and increase the quantity and quality of

artificial and grass sports pitches through the implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

5.1 This report presents the results of a public consultation undertaken between 27 April 2022 and 26 June 2022, relating to the provision of a new sports pitch at Manor Park.

### Background

5.2 A Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), including a Priority Action Plan, was adopted by the Council in November 2019. The overall position stated in the PPS is that there is a significant short fall in the provision of artificial and grass pitches in relation to demand from local teams.

5.3 Manor Park was identified as a potential location for an additional sports pitch and a feasibility study was commissioned and undertaken by the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) to determine whether a sports pitch could be located at this site (See appendix B).

5.4 The results showed that there is sufficient space for the development of the sports pitch, however, the more detailed feasibility study conducted at the site has demonstrated that there are primary limiting factors that made this development costly, very challenging and, therefore, not representing value for money in relation to the additional playing capacity that would be achieved.

5.5 A public consultation was undertaken in May and June 2022 to explore public support for the proposal. This included eight questions and the results of these are shown in Appendix A.

## 6 Results of Public Consultation

6.1 A total of 430 responses were received. 92% of the responses were from individual residents of West Berkshire, of which 50.5% “strongly disagreed” with the proposal and a further 9% “disagreed”.

6.2 In contrast 21% of respondents “strongly agreed” with the proposal and 13.75% “agreed.” Several clubs and football related organisations responded, including a local Sunday league and several teams indicated they would wish to play at Manor Park if the sports pitch was developed. The limited additional capacity created by a new grass sports pitch could not meet the expressed demand from the clubs that responded to the public consultation and this could lead to frustration even if the development was completed.

6.3 In relation to the question “How important is it that the Council addresses the shortfall of sports pitches?”, 47% of respondents viewed that this was “extremely important” or “very important”, with a further 19% stating it was “somewhat important”. 13% of respondents felt that addressing the shortfall of sports pitches was “not important at all” (Appendix A)

- 6.4 Respondents were asked how the Council might address their concerns in relation to this specific development. The most common grouping of responses was to reopen Faraday Stadium, find another alternative location and to increase community access to more school sports pitches.
- 6.5 Analysis of the results of respondents by postcode showed that within the postcode RG14 2NG (in which Manor Park is located), 73% of residents “strongly disagreed” with the proposal and 8% “disagreed”.

## 7 Site Challenges

- 7.1 The feasibility report undertaken by the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI), highlighted a number of principle challenges to developing the site to accommodate a sports pitch (Appendix B)
- 7.2 The site has a pronounced roughly diagonal fall from the northwest of the site (110.79m) to the south of the site (103.19m). A major ‘cut and fill’ earthworks operation would be required to create a pitch platform with uniform grade to meet Sport England requirements requiring in excess of 13,000 cubic square metres of soil at an estimate cost of £130k-£150k.
- 7.3 The existing site topsoil is of poor-quality (clay loam topsoil), with poor drainage characteristics, indicating likely waterlogging. An intensive sports pitch drainage system would be required for a sports pitch installation to prevent water logging. One utility service which was confirmed was an oil pipeline. STRI mapped the approximate surface location of the oil pipes during the topographical survey. STRI met with Exolum, who operate the pipeline. The pipes are noted to be approximately 1m under the surface and have 8 and 10 inch pipe diameters. These oil lines were noted to be running to Heathrow. It was suggested that one of the pipes may be unused but there is no way of knowing unless a trial hole excavation was carried out. It is possible to construct over this pipeline, however, usually 750 mm cover is needed. Exolum will need to be present while working in this area. To divert the pipeline around the park would cost approximately £20,000 per m per pipe (two pipes). The location of the oil pipeline is shown in Appendix B.
- 7.4 It should be noted that there are no toilets at this location. If any works were to take place toilet facilities would need to be provided.
- 7.5 Extra parking needs to be considered. There is some scope to extend the car park to the south-west to create more spaces. That car park is, however, outside of the Council’s ownership. Legal Services has considered the position as to ownership of the car park and it has been established that the current owner (David Wilson Homes) is under an obligation to transfer the land upon which the car park is situated to the Council at no cost, pursuant to the provisions of a Section 52 Town and Country Planning Act 1971 Agreement. Property Services have held discussions with David Wilson Homes in relation to this matter and terms have been agreed for its transfer to the Council pursuant to the Section 52 Agreement. As such it is likely that this transfer will proceed regardless of any decision as to the sports pitch.

## 8 Cost Estimates

8.1 Cost estimates for the scheme were collated by STRI in 2022 and are detailed below. For the scheme to commence in 2023/2024, an additional 10% should be considered due to inflationary factors. This excludes provision for a toilet block and works associated with increasing the size of the car park.

8.2 Table 1 - Cost estimates

Item	Cost (£)
Pre-Planning Surveys and Engagement	40,000
Planning Submission	15,000
Soil Importation (if required)	130-150,000
Construction	105,000
Contingency Allowance (10%)	29,000 – 31,000
Total Exc. VAT	319,000 – 341,000
Total Inc. VAT (20%)	382,800 – 409,200

## 9 Pre-Planning Application Advice

9.1 A pre-planning application was made for the sports pitch and written advice received on 18 July 2022. This highlights that the principle of the development is acceptable, however, all other material considerations will need to be addressed as part of a full planning application. Sport England (SE), is a statutory consultee for all sport related development. As such, SE will need to be consulted at planning application stage if the proposal is to proceed. Previous indications from SE estimates a deficit of approximately 27.5 adult size natural grass pitches identified in the PPS. The proposed playing pitch is, therefore, compliant with the PPS in terms of partly addressing the deficit.

9.2 The pre-application also sets out the process for relocating a Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) previously established via a Section 106 Agreement. This would need to be relocated from the north east of the site to the south east to enable a full size pitch to be located at Manor Park.

## 10 Proposal

10.1 In evaluating the results of the public consultation, alongside the feasibility report produced by STRI, and the pre-planning application advice, it is evident that the construction of a sports pitch at this site would go against the wishes of the majority of respondents from the public consultation and prove to be a very complicated and expensive development. It is therefore proposed not to progress with a full planning application for the creation of a grass sports pitch at Manor Park.

## 11 Other options considered

11.1 There will remain a deficit in the number of playing pitches in West Berkshire in comparison to demand and the Council will continue to assess sites within the district with a view to their suitability as playing pitches. Such assessments to take into account local demand, costs, public opinion and the views of Sport England and National Governing Bodies of Sport.

11.2 The Playing Pitch Strategy has placed a strong emphasis on increasing the number of artificial grass pitches across West Berkshire, primarily due to their vastly superior capacity to accommodate training and matches compared to a grass sports pitch. Allocating funding to 3G artificial pitches will be a more effective way to meet community demand.

11.3 A Stage E review of the PPS has been completed, following consultation with both Sport England and the National Governing Bodies of Sport for Football, Rugby, Cricket and Hockey and will be reported to a future Executive, setting out the latest demand and supply data relating to sports pitches across West Berkshire and reviewing priority projects.

## 12 Conclusion

12.1 Whilst there is a clear strategic requirement to increase the number of playing pitches in West Berkshire in order to meet demand from increasing numbers of teams (with particular growth in teams for women and girls), there are a number of factors that align against the development of a sports pitch at Manor Park.

12.2 Most significant is the strong local opposition expressed through the consultation, primarily by individuals who live within the postcode in which Manor Park is located. This was in contrast to respondents who represented local football teams who were supportive of the proposal.

12.3 Secondly, there are a number of site factors that make the development of the sports pitch very expensive, including a requirement to import significant volumes of soil to level the site and to install a comprehensive drainage system to prevent flooding due to the soil characteristics at the site.

12.4 Thirdly, significant work will be required with third parties to build the sports pitch over the existing oil pipeline, to relocate the locally equipped play area and to complete negotiations to acquire land to increase the size of the car park.

## Results of Public Consultation – Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park

- 12.5 All of these factors point to a costly and complex development that would only create a single grass sports pitch that could accommodate 4-6 hours of play each week. Capital expenditure is forecast to exceed £400,000 to create the pitch and will also require additional expenditure on ancillary facilities (toilet block and additional car parking) to support the sports pitch are factored into the total cost plan.
- 12.6 The provision of a sports pitch at Manor Park had the potential to mitigate a potential Sport England requirement to secure a new grass sports pitch if the Newbury sports hub was developed. If the Sports Hub was developed an alternative location for a sports pitch will need to be identified. A recent review of supply and demand for sports pitches and new emerging opportunities will enable alternative locations to be considered for future sports pitch provision.

## 13 Appendices

13.1 Appendix A – Powerpoint presentation of public consultation results relating to Manor Park

13.2 Appendix B – Manor Park Sports Pitch Feasibility Study

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### Background Papers:

Pre-Planning Application Advice for Sports Pitch at Manor Park

#### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

#### Officer details:

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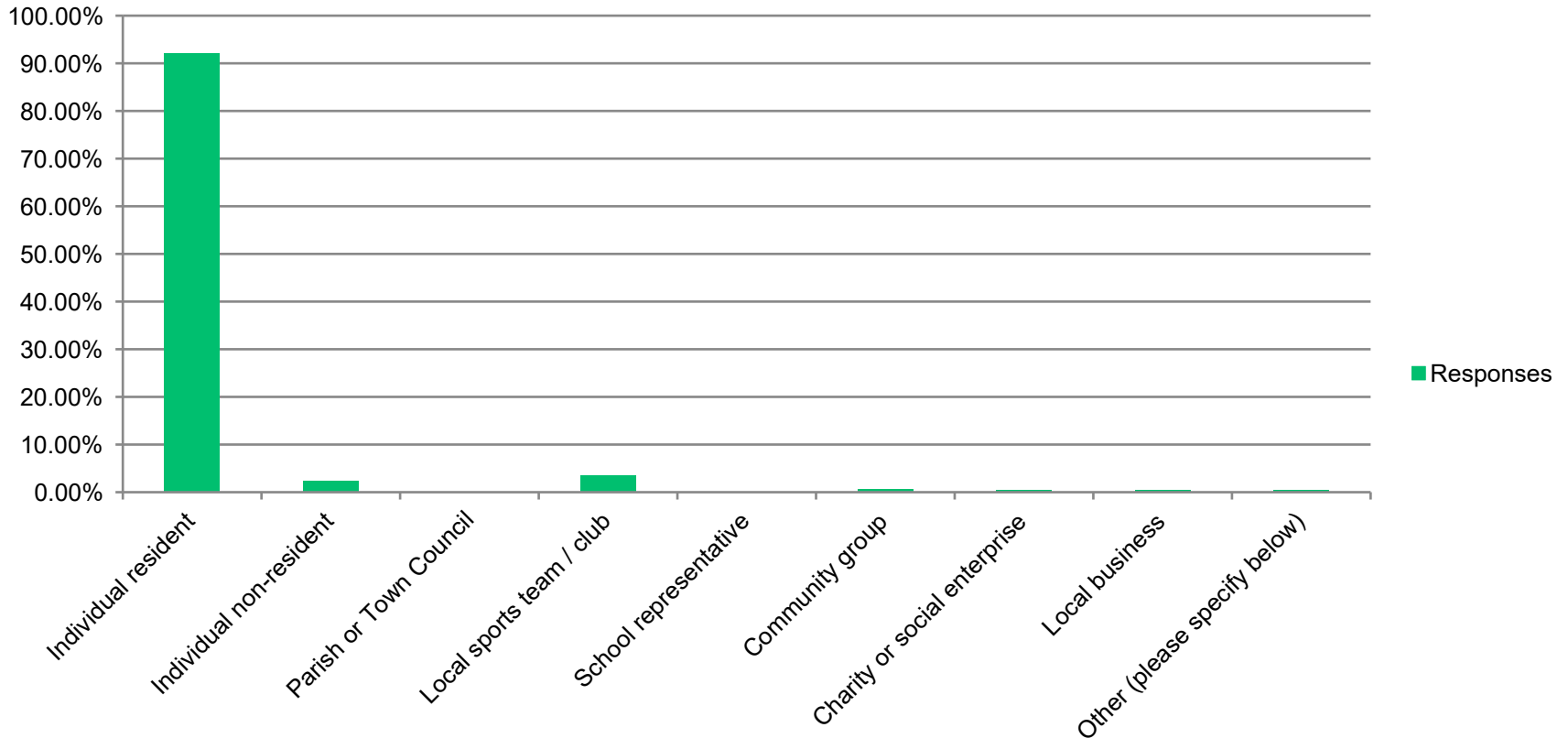
# Results of Manor Park Consultation

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Conducted  
April 27 to June 26, 2022

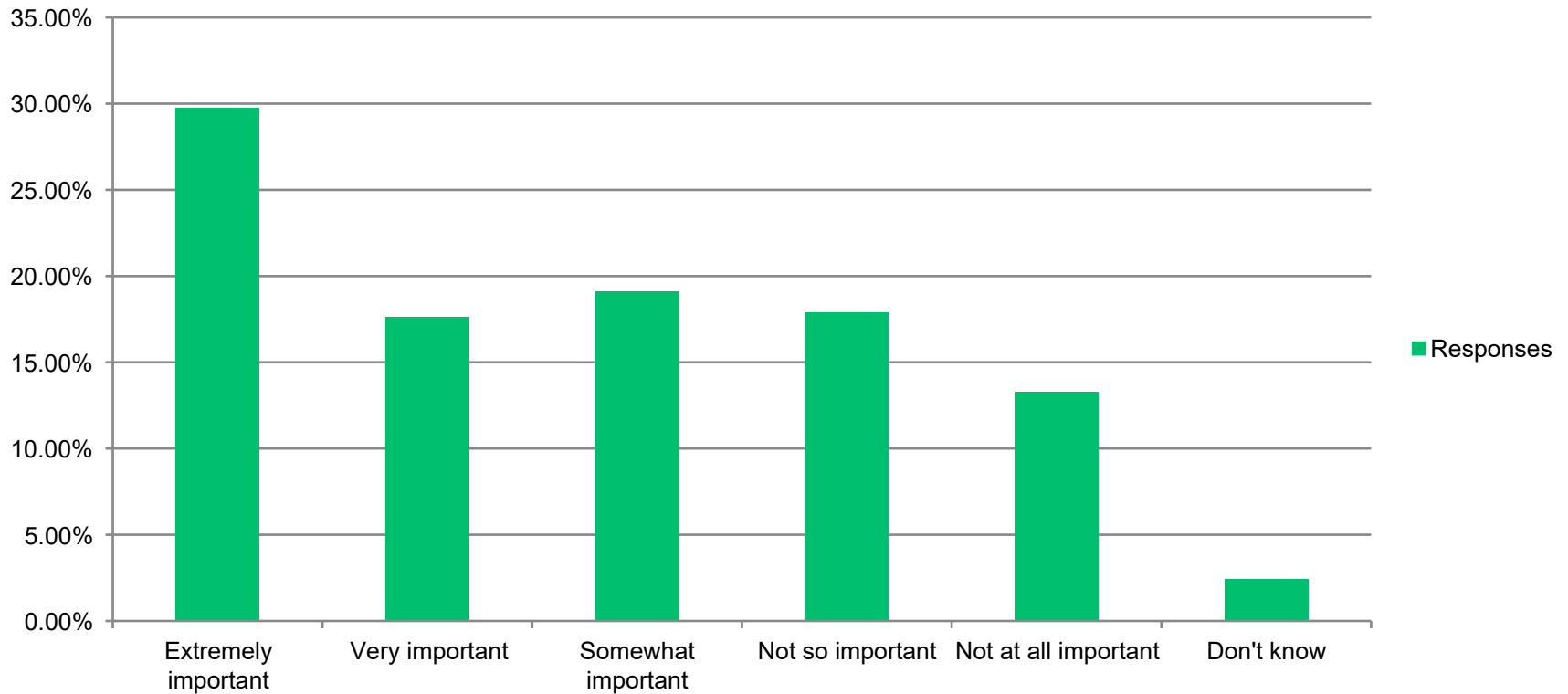
# All Responses

## Which of the following best describes you?



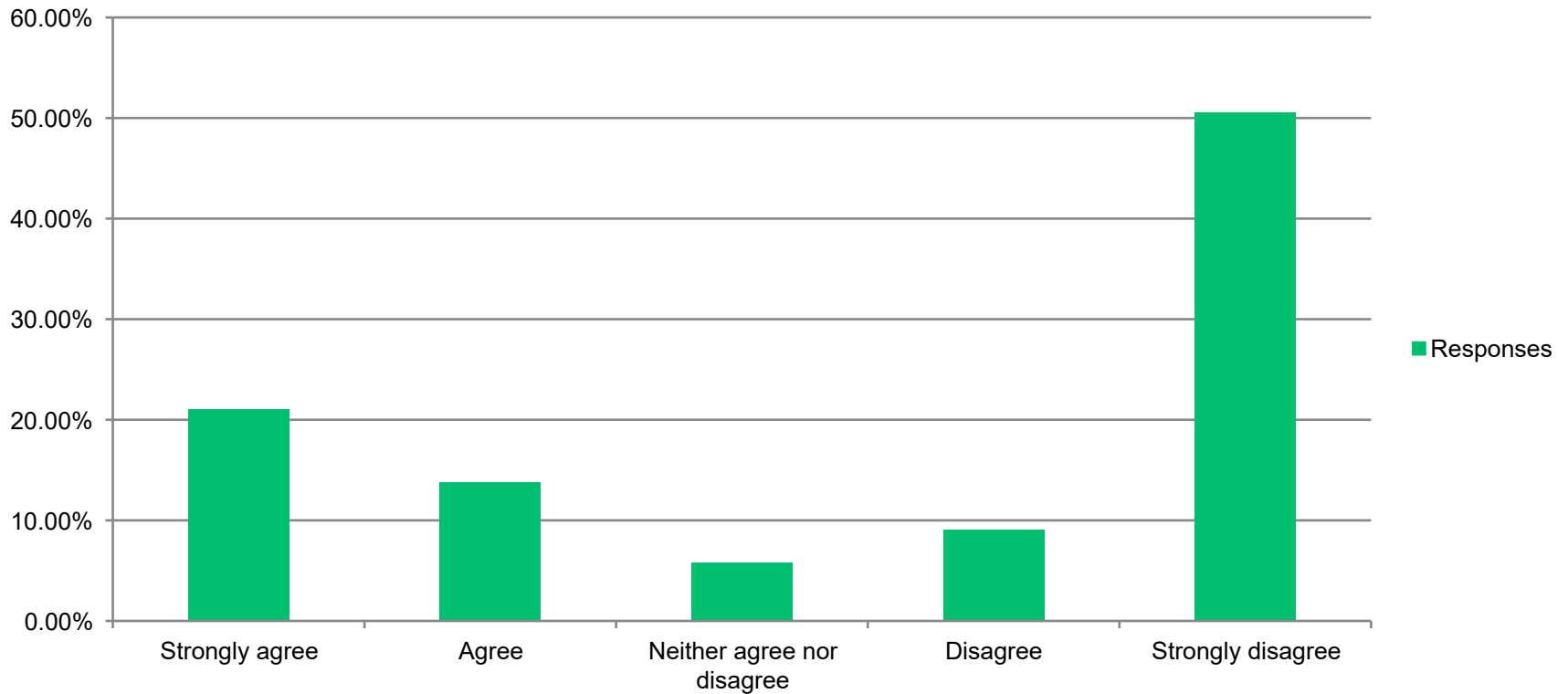
# All Responses

**How important do you think it is for the council to address the shortage in supply of sports pitches in West Berkshire?**



# All Responses

To what extent do you agree with the council's proposal to provide a new sports pitch at Manor Park, Newbury?



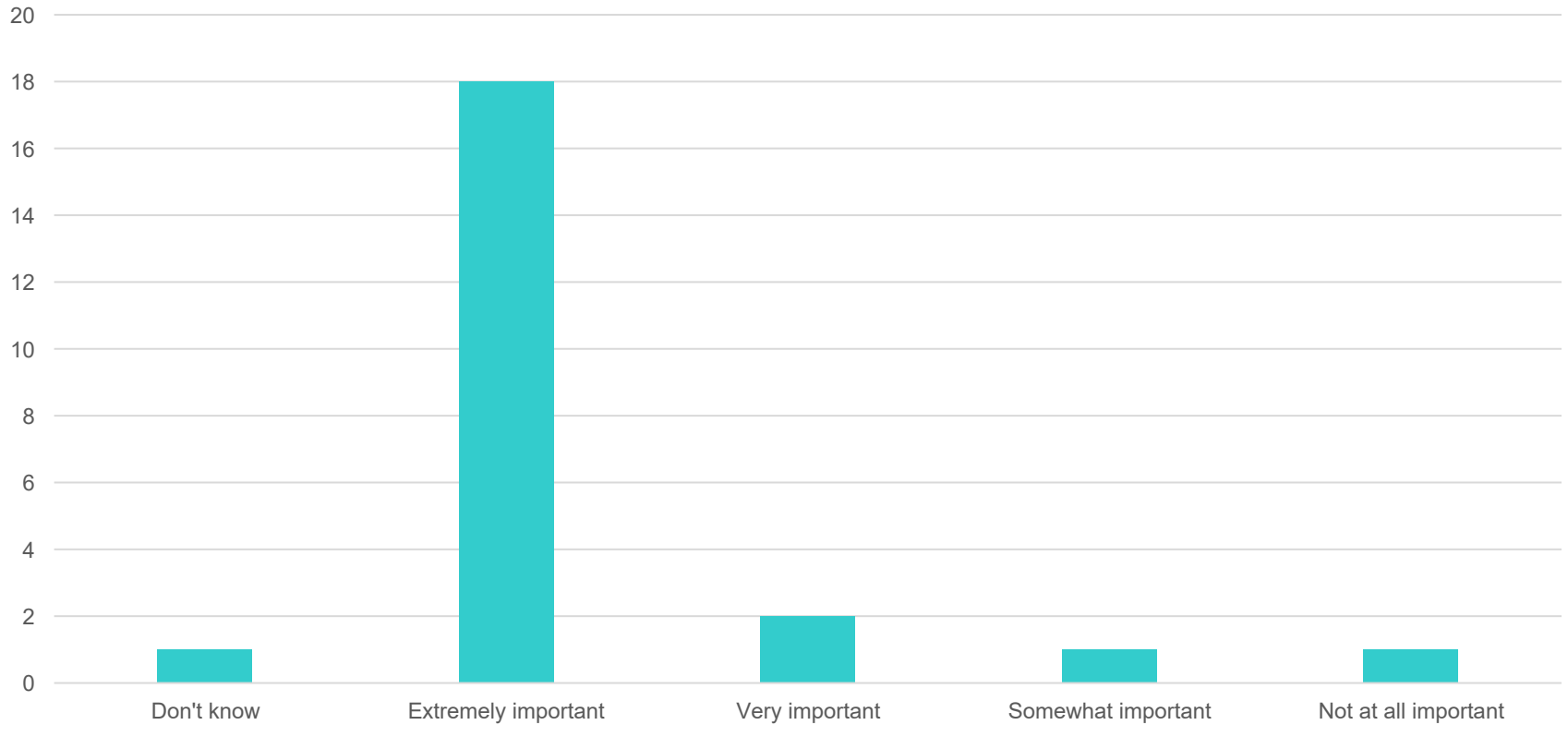
# Postcode analysis of Responses

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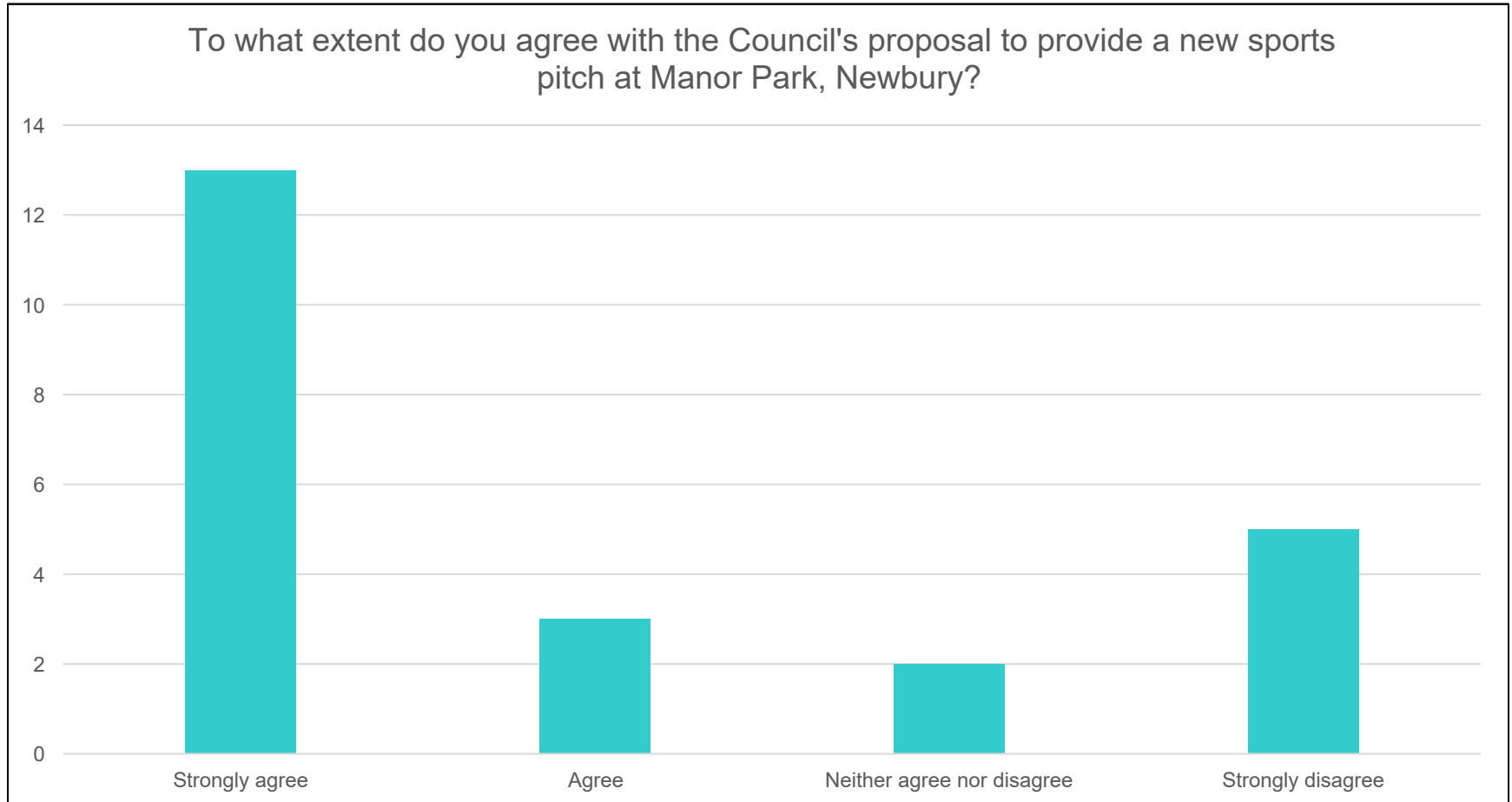
Postcode area	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Number of respondents
RG14 2	8.33%	7.35%	2.94%	8.82%	72.55%	204
Grand Total	20.74%	13.92%	4.26%	8.24%	52.84%	352

# Clubs and Organisations

How important do you think it is for the Council to address the shortage in supply of sports pitches in West Berkshire?

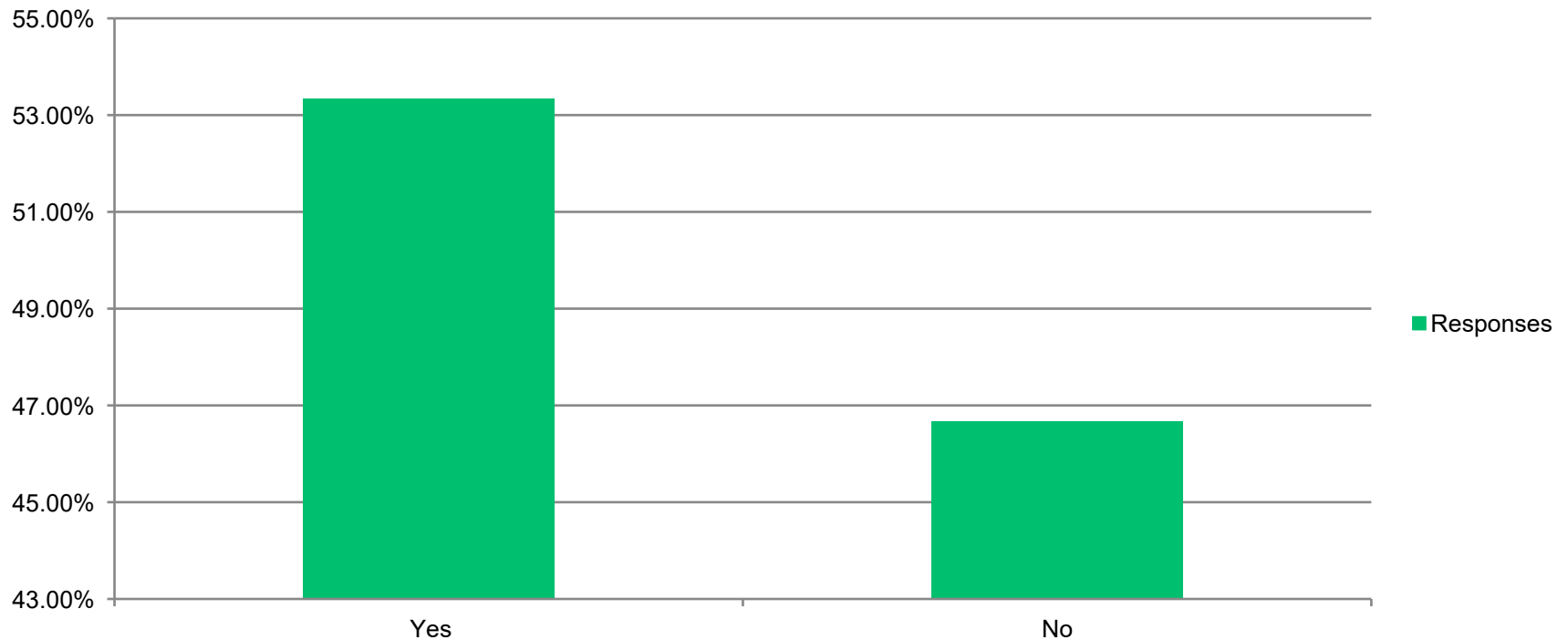


# Clubs and Organisations



# All Responses

**Would you like to register your team's interest to play on the pitch should the decision be made to proceed with this proposal?**





# Clubs and their Teams

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Clubs who either agreed or strongly agreed to the Manor Park proposal and the number of teams per club.

Thatcham Tornados (including all Junior, Girls, Mens and Walking teams)	41
Newbury Ladies FC (Football Fun Factory)	2
Csa Newbury	17
AFC Newbury	16

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Making great sport happen

## **West Berkshire District Council**

Manor Park

Sports Pitch Feasibility Report

Prepared by: Mark Murphy

Date: December 2021



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**Report Title:** Sports Pitch Feasibility Report

**Sports Facility Name:** Manor Park

**Date of Visit:** 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021

**Visit Objective:** Initial site appraisal

If you have any queries with regards to this report, please call +44 (0)1274 565131 or email [enquiries@strigroup.com](mailto:enquiries@strigroup.com)

This report has been produced in good faith for exclusive use by West Berkshire District Council in relation to the development of the proposed natural grass sports pitch at Manor Park. STRI accept no liability or responsibility whatsoever in respect of any use of this report beyond the scope of its application by any third party. The report is the property of STRI and may not be copied nor reproduced without prior written approval of STRI except for the purposes of dealing specifically with the management and implementation of this project.

Prepared by: Mark Murphy

Date: 16/08/2021

## 1.0 Introduction and Background

### 1.1 General

STRI has been appointed by West Berkshire District Council to assess the feasibility of developing a natural grass sports pitch on an area of park land within Manor Park.

STRI understand that the proposed development consists of a natural grass area which is currently not been used as a grass playing surface. Historically, the area had been used for park land only.

As such, the objectives of the appraisal are summarised below:

1. To review existing site information made available to STRI.
2. To investigate and report on the present situation including:
  - Surface levels.
  - The topsoil and ground conditions.
  - The drainage conditions and drainage infrastructure present.
3. To provide discussion/recommendations on whether to develop a natural grass sports pitch within the Site boundary.

The report includes a photographic record of the conditions observed during the site visit. Additional site visit photos shall be made available upon request.

Representative samples of topsoil were collected for physical and chemical analysis. The results of the soil laboratory analyses are set out in table form within the general site description to enable comparison of the results. The full soil analysis reports are included as appendices to this report.

### 1.2 Site Appraisal

The Site was inspected on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2021 by Mark Murphy, STRI Design Consultant and Luke Gawthorp, STRI Design Technician.

### 1.3 Reporting

The data obtained from the Site survey is reported in a standard format, containing the following information:

- General site information.
- The type and condition of the vegetation and presence of weeds.
- The general geomorphological and soil conditions.
- The local climatic conditions.
- The type and condition of the soil profile and drainage systems present.
- General hydrology and drainage conditions.
- The overall performance is discussed with comments on the significant limiting factors.

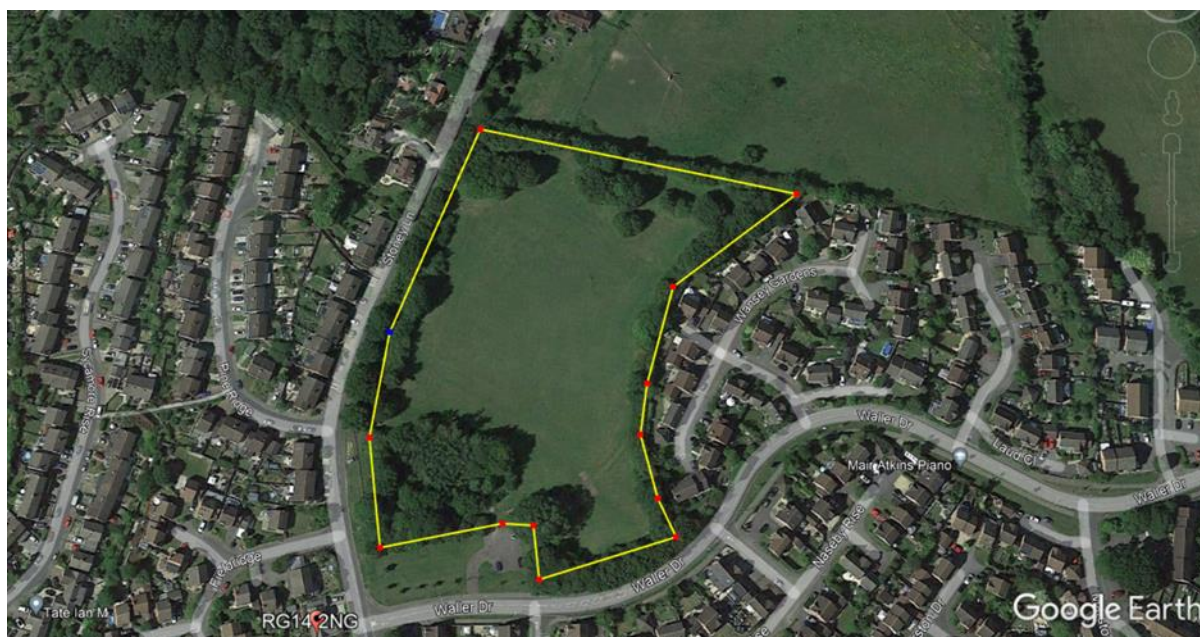
- Recommendations.

## 2.0 General Site Description

### 2.1 Location

**Site Address:** Manor Park, Stoney Lane, Newbury, RG14 2 NG.

The area within the scope of this report is a roughly rectangular shaped parcel of land.



*Figure 1 Area within scope of STRI feasibility study (demarcated by solid yellow line)*

Hereafter, the area within the scope of the STRI feasibility study as illustrated in Figure 1 will be referred to as 'the Site'.

The Site area measures approximately 21,194 m<sup>2</sup> (2.119 hectares) and consists of existing grass land which was being managed to a poor standard.

The existing access to the Site is directly off the existing carpark off Waller Drive through a single agricultural style gate. The Site has a mature tree boundary which includes various different species as noted. The Site is bound to the north by trees/hedgerow, bound to the south by the carpark, swale/soakaway and Waller Drive. The Site is bound to the east by a housing development and bound to the west by trees and Stoney Lane.

There is sufficient space to accommodate a full-size rugby/football pitch while adhering to Sport England guidelines (94 x 70 m).

### 2.2 Existing Sports Facilities

There were no existing natural grass sports facilities within the Site boundary, the car park was noted to be small.

## 2.3 Topography and Surface Evenness

### 2.3.1 Levels and Gradients

Surface levels and gradients have been assessed based on a topographic survey carried out by an STRI consultant (see Appendix 4).

The Site has a pronounced, roughly diagonal fall from the north-west corner to the south-east corner.

The highest ground levels were observed in the north-west corner of the Site (110.79 m). The lowest ground levels were observed in the south of the Site (103.19 m).

Based on the topographic information as reviewed by STRI, it can be confirmed that a major cut and fill earthworks operation would be required if any developments were to take place on this area to create a pitch platform with a uniform grade to meet Sport England Requirements cross fall. There is a 1:21 fall across the Site.

### 2.3.2 Surface Evenness

Surface evenness within the area under examination was generally good with few if any high spots or undulations on the platform, although the gradient was quite steep (1:21). It should be noted there was an open drain running from the south-east to the south (swale/soakaway), which affects surface evenness in that area.

## 2.4 Existing Vegetation

At the time of the investigation, the Site and surrounding area was well grassed, the turf being dominated with perennial ryegrass, along with other weed grass species such as annual meadow-grass, Yorkshire Fog and minor fescue sp. Significant broad-leafed weed populations were a common theme throughout the area with plantain, clover and buttercups. At the time of the visit the grass height was roughly 100 mm. The Site was surrounded by semi-mature/mature trees. It was noted that these trees/hedgerows have not been maintained and have grown over. The swale contained water at the time of visit.

## 2.5 Climate

The average monthly rainfall (mm) is shown below using data from [Reading University](#), the nearest official Met Office climate station for the period 1981 – 2010.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
61	41	45	48	46	45	46	52	50	72	66	63	635

*Average monthly rainfall mm*

It should be noted that Met Office data for the period 1981 – 2010 shows that average annual rainfall observed at the Reading University climate station is below the England average.

Reading University average annual rainfall 1981 – 2010 = 635 mm

England average annual rainfall 1981 – 2010 = 885 mm



The months receiving the highest average rainfall at the Reading University climate station are October, November, December and January.

The average minimum temperature using data from Reading University, for the period 1981 – 2010 is 6.7°C. It should be noted that the average minimum temperature is in above with the England average minimum temperature (5.9°C).

The average maximum temperature using data from Reading University for the period 1981 – 2010 is 14.5°C. It should be noted that the average maximum temperature is again above the England average maximum temperature (13.5°C).

## **2.7 Topsoil Conditions**

It should be noted that the quality of a sports surface is always dependent in the soil or growing medium used in its construction.

A series of trial pits were excavated during the Site investigation at various locations to confirm the topsoil conditions. In summary, the existing site topsoil was of poor-quality clay loam topsoil which had an easily consolidated structure at the time of visit. There was red ochre colouring observed along root lines which is indicative of seasonal waterlogging. Across all three test pits rootlets were observed within the soil profile.

Trail pits were excavated in three locations covering the south, central and northern sections of the Site.

### *Southern section*

Dark-brown, easily consolidated clay loam topsoil to 330 mm depth. Roots to 160 mm depth. Clear interface between the topsoil and the subsoil, which was a yellow clay with increasing clay content with depth. Depth reached 450 mm. There were frequent stones and white gravel observed within the topsoil profile which were 30 mm in diameter. Earthworm activity was high.

### *Central section*

Similar dark-brown, clay loam topsoil to 370 mm depth. Roots to 150 mm depth. Clear interface between the topsoil and the subsoil which again was a similar yellow clay. Depth reached 500 mm. Slightly more white gravel was observed and less worm activity.

### *Northern section*

Again dark-brown, shallower topsoil was noted at a depth of 270 mm. Roots to 150 mm depth. Clear interface between the topsoil and the subsoil which again was a similar yellow clay. Depth reached was 400 mm. Mixture of gravel and white pebbles along with no worm activity noted.

It can be anticipated that the infiltration rate of the Site subsoil will be very low.

## **Particle Size Analysis**

Representative samples of topsoil were collected for particle size analysis to determine the mineral and organic matter composition of the Site topsoil. Full particle size analysis reports are included in Appendix 1.

For reference, winter games pitch topsoil should ideally fall into the loamy sand or sandy loam textural classification to enable suitable drainage performance.

Sample Location & STRI lab no.	Soil Texture	Sand %	Silt %	Clay %	Organic Matter %
Topsoil Sample <b>Representative topsoil sample</b> A19181/1	Clay loam	50	28	22	4.9
Subsoil Sample <b>Representative subsoil sample</b> A19383/2	Clay	44	21	35	1.3

Laboratory analysis confirms that the Site topsoil falls into the Clay loam textural classification. Although there is reasonable sand content, the soil also has a high proportion of fine particles ('fines') comprised of 22% clay, 28% silt and 40% very fine sand. There was a low proportion of larger very coarse (1%), coarse (1%) and medium sized sand (4%) particles. The high proportion of fines particles observed means hydraulic conductivity of the topsoil is likely to be low, and as such, the soil will have a high-water holding capacity. This is not conducive to the development of a rugby/football pitch surface, which must be efficiently drained to ensure playability all year round. The organic matter content of the Site was 4.9 %.

### **Chemical Analysis**

Representative samples of topsoil were collected for chemical analysis to determine the pH, extractable Phosphate ( $P_2O_5$ ) and extractable Potassium ( $K_2O$ ) levels in the Site topsoil.

The chemical analysis of the samples taken across the Site is summarised below with more detailed results shown in Appendix 2.

Sample Location & STRI lab no.	pH	pH Status	$P_2O_5$ Level (mg/l)	$P_2O_5$ Status	$K_2O$ (mg/l) Level	$K_2O$ Status
Topsoil Sample <b>Representative topsoil sample</b> A19181/1	6.8	Normal	18	Low	60	Low

Soil pH has a significant effect on the grass species which dominate the turf. For turf dominated by perennial ryegrass, for optimal growth and recovery from wear, soil pH should be in the range 6-7. Laboratory analysis shows a pH of 6.8 in the samples of topsoil collected.

Laboratory analysis shows that concentrations of extractable phosphate and potassium were generally low. For healthy turf growth, phosphate and potassium should be included as part of a balance fertiliser programme. This can be addressed during the pitch construction and longer-term maintenance thereafter and is not of concern.

## 2.8 Drainage Conditions and Systems

Overall, there were slight variations in firmness across the Site. It was noted along the east wing and south-east corner was holding a lot of water. Before entering an open drain, which runs to a large water basin in the south/south-west corner. It should be highlighted that the Site investigation was carried out in November.

When walking across the grassland area of the Site there were no obvious signs of existing drainage being present in the form of visible lines of stimulated or droughted grass growth. When assessing historical aerial photography of the Site, there was no evidence indicating the presence of drainage systems.

Given the low infiltration of the Site subsoil, an intensive sports pitch drainage system should be included within the design of any proposed pitch.

A prominent feature of the Site was the existing large water basin in the south-west corner. The Site was noted to be on a flood plain. The basin contained water at the time of the visit. There were no other viable outfall locations observed during the investigation.

## 2.9 Utilities

One utility service which was confirmed was an A/AE oil pipeline and a A/TC oil pipeline. STRI mapped the approximate surface location of the oil pipes during the topographical survey. STRI carried out a meeting with Exolum, who operate the pipeline. The pipes are noted to be approximately 1 m under the surface and have 8- and 10-inch pipe diameters. These oil lines were noted to be running to Heathrow. It was noted one of the pipes may in fact be unused by there is no way of knowing unless a trial hole excavation was carried out. To do this a CAT scan would need to be completed prior to any excavation. It is possible to construct over this pipeline, however usually 750 mm cover is needed. If less cover is needed for an earthworks operation extra measures/ control will need to be put in place. Exolum stated that pipe crossings with machinery should be limited as much as possible and should be coordinated that traffic is only crossing the pipe at one location. This is a buffer zone which is 3 m either side of either pipe (6 – 7 m in total) where extreme caution needs to be taken and Exolum will need to present while working in this area. To divert the pipeline around the park would cost approximately £20,000 per m per pipe<sup>1</sup> (2 pipes).

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<sup>1</sup> NB: this is an approximation given without prejudice following a discussion with Exolum

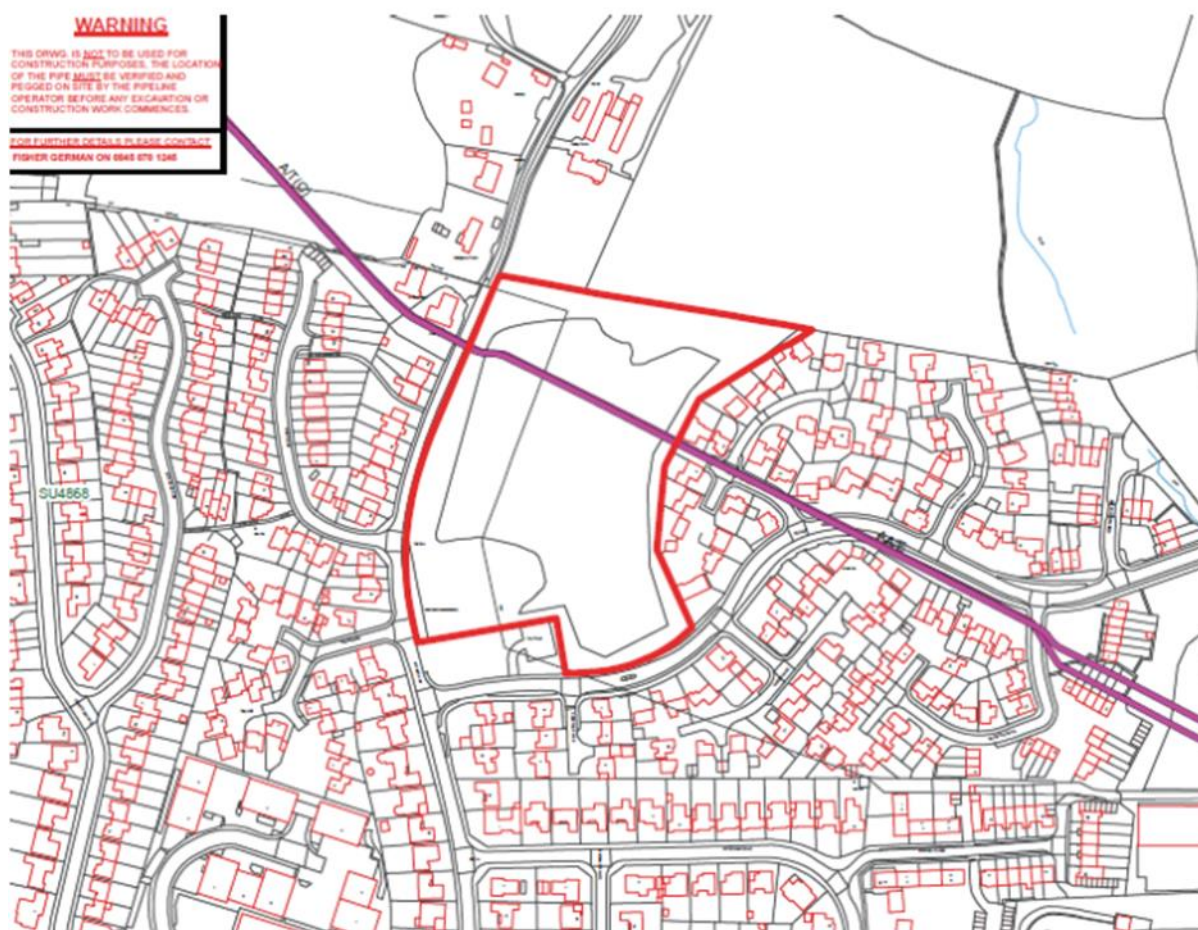


Figure 2 Indicative location of pipeline in purple

### 3.0 Ecological Report executive summary

West Berkshire District Council are looking to employ a consultant to submit a planning application for the development of a new rugby pitch with the potential to create a multi-use sports pitch. The Council have identified two potential sites within the district for the proposed development, Hollybrook Linear Park and Manor Park. The Manor Park site was identified as requiring a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). The survey aimed to identify any ecological constraints, protected habitats, or species constraints across the site.

A baseline UK Habitat Classification survey was conducted to create a detailed map of the site and all the habitats currently present. There are no historic Tree Protection Orders (TPO) placed over any of the trees on the Site, however some mature trees were identified. Good quality scrub, patches of woodland and hedgerow are present on site. Woodland patches, treelines, hedgerows and individual mature trees, including root protection zones have been mapped. A small patch of wet woodland is located in the southwest area of the site which is a priority habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitats Descriptions.

Any mature trees will need to be checked for bat roost potential before removal. Any potential works needing vegetation clearance will need to consider breeding birds, badgers, small mammals and

reptiles. Further amphibian and bat activity surveys will be needed if works are to affect the woodland patches and wet woodland habitats. Compensation will be needed for the loss of any habitat.

## 4.0 Discussion

When considering the development of a new sports pitch at this site, the following points should be considered.

- There is sufficient space to accommodate a full-size rugby/football pitch while adhering to Sport England guidelines (94 x 70 m).
- The Site currently has a range of grass and weed species. Before any upgrades to any pitches the existing vegetation should be thoroughly killed off and removed to enable the pitch development works and to prevent weed re-infestation.
- The primary limiting factor site has a pronounced, roughly diagonal fall from the north-west corner to the south-east corner. A major cut and fill earthworks operation would be required if there were any developments on this site as there is a 1:21 fall to provide a pitch platform with a uniform grade to meet Sport England Requirements (1:80 - 1:100 along the line of play and 1:40 - 1:50 across the line of play). Quite a substantial amount of material would need to be imported to create a pitch platform (+ 13,353.44 Cu. M.) which will come at a significant cost.
- Another limiting factor of this site is the oil pipe running from east to west in the northern part of this site. 750 mm cover must be maintained over these pipes when construction is taking place. Exolum need to be present when any works are been carried out within the buffer zone. Crossings of the oil pipelines are restricted to one designated area.
- The other limiting factor of this site is the poor topsoil. Topsoil which laboratory analysis has confirmed is a clay loam. It can be anticipated that the Site topsoil will have very poor drainage characteristics, which may be exacerbated by maintenance and play (wear). This site topsoil contains extreme high levels fines (fine sand, silt & clay). The topsoil consists of 90% fines. As such, the topsoil which is indigenous to the Site is not ideally suited to the provision of winter games pitches.
- There is no known outfall option which means the water will have to be retained and disposed of onsite using a soakaway. There is an existing large water basin in the south-west corner for attenuating water. It is unclear this was created as a soakaway. With that said soakaway/percolation testing will need to take place.
- The existing access to the Site is directly off the existing carpark off Waller Drive through a single agricultural style gate.
- The wettest months of the year at the Site are October, November, December and January. This coincides with the months with low average minimum temperatures. Winter rainfall coupled with low levels of evaporation mean drainage is likely to be the another limiting factor affecting the quality of the natural grass surface during the winter months of the year.

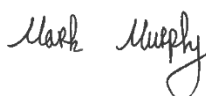
- It should be noted that there are no changing facilities/ toilets at this location. If any works were to take place these facilities would need to be provided. Extra parking needs to be considered, there is some scope to extend the car park to the south-west to create more spaces.
- This site was noted to have good ecological elements with many native species of trees and wildlife species. STRI independent Ecology report is attached in separate pdf document.

## 5.0 Recommendations

A significant amount of import material is needed to create a pitch platform with a uniform grade. The topsoil is a poor-quality clay loam with a high percentage of fines and will have limited drainage capabilities. The oil pipeline is anticipated to cause issues for the reasons mentioned above. There are no changing/ toilet facilities located at this site and would need to be developed. This site was noted by STRI's ecology team to have good ecological elements across the entire area. Taking high level costing estimates into account STRI think this site is a less feasible/ cost efficient to develop.

With all this said it is recommended not to develop this site due to the limiting factors and it is recommended to develop Holybrook Linear Park as an alternative.

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark Murphy'.

**Mark Murphy**

**Design Consultant**

**t: 01274 565131**

**e: [mark.murphy@strigroup.com](mailto:mark.murphy@strigroup.com)**

## Appendix 1 – Soil Particle Size Analysis

# STRI

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### SOIL PARTICLE SIZE ANALYSIS

CLIENT: WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL DATE: 26/11/21  
RESULTS TO: MM  
DESCRIPTION: REPRESENTATIVE TOPSOIL SAMPLE NO: A19383/1  
MANOR PARK

CATEGORY	DIAMETER mm	%
Stones	>8	9
Coarse gravel	8-4	1
Fine gravel	4-2	1

Particle size distribution of mineral matter smaller than 2mm

Very coarse sand	2-1	1
Coarse sand	1.0-0.5	1
Medium sand	0.50-0.25	4
Fine sand	0.250-0.125	4
Very fine sand	0.125-0.050	40
Silt	0.050-0.002	28
Clay	<0.002	22
Loss on ignition (% of oven-dry fine earth)		4.9
Calcium carbonate %		0.4
SOIL TEXTURE		CLAY LOAM

T = TRACE

THESE RESULTS PERTAIN ONLY TO THE SAMPLE(S) SUBMITTED AND TESTED

## SOIL PARTICLE SIZE ANALYSIS

CLIENT: WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL DATE: 26/11/21  
 RESULTS TO : MM  
 DESCRIPTION: REPRESENTATIVE SUBSOIL SAMPLE NO : A19383/2  
 MANOR PARK

CATEGORY	DIAMETER mm	%
Stones	>8	0
Coarse gravel	8-4	0
Fine gravel	4-2	T

Particle size distribution of mineral matter smaller than 2mm

Very coarse sand	2-1	T
Coarse sand	1.0-0.5	T
Medium sand	0.50-0.25	1
Fine sand	0.250-0.125	1
Very fine sand	0.125-0.050	42
Silt	0.050-0.002	21
Clay	<0.002	35
Loss on ignition (% of oven-dry fine earth)		1.3
Calcium carbonate	%	NIL
SOIL TEXTURE		CLAY

T = TRACE

THESE RESULTS PERTAIN ONLY TO THE SAMPLE(S) SUBMITTED AND TESTED





## Appendix 2 – Soil Chemical Analysis

# STRI

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## SOIL CHEMICAL ANALYSIS

CLIENT:

WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESULTS TO: MM

DATE RECEIVED:

15/11/2021

Lab No.	Source	pH	P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub> (mg/l)	K <sub>2</sub> O (mg/l)
A19383/1	REPRESENTATIVE TOPSOIL MANOR PARK	6.8	18	60
A19383/3	REPRESENTATIVE TOPSOIL HOLYBROOK LINEAR PARK	7.1	48	63

Mr M A Baines, Soil Laboratory Manager

THE RESULTS PERTAIN ONLY TO THE SAMPLE(S) SUBMITTED AND TESTED.

**Appendix 3 – Site Investigation Photos**



**Photo 1:** General site photo taken from a drone (NE)



**Photo 2:** General site photo taken from a drone (SW)



**Photo 3:** General site photo (S)



**Photo 4:** General site photo (N)



**Photo 5:** Surface location of oil pipes



**Photo 6:** Open drain



**Photo 7:** Culvert drain



**Photo 8:** Outlet of culvert drain into basin



**Photo 9:** Large water basin in SW corner



**Photo 10:** Test pit 1- topsoil 330 mm deep



**Photo 11:** Subsoil TP1



**Photo 12:** TP3 – topsoil 250 mm deep



**Photo 11:** Existing Vegetation



**Photo 11:** Existing vegetation

## Appendix 4 – Topographic Survey



## Appendix 5 – Proposed Pitch Location



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## Community Forums

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Tony Vickers
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	13 September 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Sarah Clarke
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4427

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### 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council is committed to proactively engaging with the communities that we serve to ensure the best outcomes for all. The Council therefore intends to establish Community Forums, where residents and others will be invited to participate in discussions with Members and senior officers at in-person meetings.
- 1.2 The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity has indicated that meetings of the Environment Advisory Group be more open. This report sets out proposals for an Environment Action Group (EAG) Open Forum that seek to facilitate this proposal.
- 1.3 This report sets out the considerations that will be relevant to the operation of Community Forums, and seeks views regarding the same. The potential resource implications are also highlighted.

### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Executive note the establishment of Community Forums on the basis of the following operating model:
  - (a) Community Forums will take place as and when the need arises, but at least quarterly
  - (b) These will be attended by a Member of the Executive
  - (c) The Chief Executive or relevant Executive Director will attend and be supported by the relevant Service Director or senior manager depending on discussion topics
  - (d) These meetings should take place at various locations across the district on a roving basis with invitees attending in person, but must have the ability to be operated in a hybrid format

## Community Forums

- (e) Topics for discussion will relate to matters of interest to communities in all or part of the district, which must be approved by the Leader
  - (f) A Community Forum Webpage will be developed to promote the meetings and to provide feedback and updates on items discussed at meetings
- 2.2 Executive are asked to note the Community Forum Terms of Reference, produced at Appendix B.
- 2.3 Executive are also asked to note the EAG Open Forum Terms of Reference, which can be found at Appendix C.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<u>Community Forum:</u> If meetings take place in locations across the district, fees may be incurred for venue hire. Details will need to be considered, but it is hoped that any such costs would be limited.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p><u>Community Forum:</u> There is no existing resource to support Community Forums and the impact of these on existing resource will need to be monitored. In addition to the administrative support required, senior officers will need to support this in advance of, during, and following meetings to ensure that any actions are followed up.</p> <p><u>EAG Open Forum:</u> This proposal will result in additional responsibilities for officers to support these meetings. There will be additional work for both Democratic Services in the administration of the meetings, and for the Environment Team who will need to consider and respond to proposals that are brought forward by interest groups.</p>
<b>Legal:</b>	There is no legal duty to hold Community Forums or the EAG.
<b>Risk Management:</b>	None
<b>Property:</b>	None
<b>Policy:</b>	This proposal aligns with the Council's commitment to engage with and listen to our communities.



	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>	X			Delivering the meetings in a hybrid format will enable more people within the community to access the same.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		

<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	This proposal will result in enhanced engagement with our communities.
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## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Following the successful Community Forum event held on the 17<sup>th</sup> August, this reports sets out details for the future operation of Community Forums. In summary, it is proposed:
- (a) Community Forums will take place as required, but at least on a quarterly basis
  - (b) These will be chaired by a Member of the Executive
  - (c) The Chief Executive or Executive Director will attend and be supported by the relevant Service Director depending on discussion topics
  - (d) These meetings should take place at locations in the communities with people invited to attend in person, but also using a hybrid format
  - (e) Topics will relate to matters of interest to communities in the district
  - (f) A Community Forum blog will be developed to promote the meetings and to provide feedback and updates on items discussed at meetings
- 4.2 The Executive have expressed a desire to engage with our communities in this manner, and Community Forums will therefore be established as detailed in this report.
- 4.3 A review will be undertaken 12 months after the first meeting, to review the effectiveness of the operating model.
- 4.4 The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity has indicated that meetings of the Environment Advisory Group should be more open, by inviting relevant interest groups to give presentations and participate in debate on relevant items.
- 4.5 It has been suggested that this should take place up to 6 times per annum, and the meeting will enable information and expertise to be effectively shared by both the Council and interested parties for the benefit of our communities.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 The Administration committed to the establishment of Community Forums, and to opening advisory groups to public scrutiny, and this report sets out details of how they will do so.

### Background

#### Community Forums

## Community Forums

- 5.2 Although there is no legal obligation for the Council to operate Community Forums, communication and engagement with the community is an essential element of ensuring that the Council is operating effectively. The Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge of the Council in 2019, and among its recommendations noted that the Council needed to improve its communication and engagement with residents. Whilst significant improvements have been made in this regard, particularly during Covid, it is considered that further opportunities for improvement exist.
- 5.3 The Council previously operated Community Forums, which were originally aligned to the same geographical areas as the then (four) area planning committees, with a fifth Area Forum introduced in 2004.
- 5.4 Attendance at those meetings by residents was variable, ranging from a few individuals up to 60 and a cross party Task Group set up in 2008, made a recommendation to Council, which was approved, to discontinue the Area Forums.
- 5.5 The consultation which took place prior to that recommendation being adopted, was largely supportive of Area Forums continuing.
- 5.6 The following issues were some of the issues identified by the consultation:
- (a) Only one or two items of interest on each agenda
  - (b) Format of meetings too formal
  - (c) Attendance low due to poor publicity
  - (d) Overloaded agendas with long reports
  - (e) Clarity needed on the purpose and powers of Area Forums
- 5.7 Some of the suggested improvements included:
- (a) Helpful to enable members of the public to have their say
  - (b) Helpful mechanism by which the Council can receive feedback
  - (c) Each forum should have a theme
  - (d) Forums could relate to a topic of concern / interest
  - (e) Forums should take place in the communities
- 5.8 As a result of Covid, West Berkshire Council made changes to the manner in which it operated public meetings for decision making bodies, moving initially to on-line Member meetings, to a hybrid style which remains in operation now. Although decision makers must physically attend meetings as required by law, hybrid meetings enable other participants to attend remotely. This gives those individuals greater flexibility to be 'present' for their item of interest only.

## Community Forums

- 5.9 The level of engagement with the Council's democratic processes was significantly enhanced by the ability to enable public participation remotely. All public meetings now continue to be live streamed, and recordings of the meetings are made available after the event. Enabling interested parties to attend remotely has improved the accessibility of meetings, and has also delivered environmental benefits, as people are no longer required to physically travel to meetings in order to participate.
- 5.10 It is considered that the feedback provided in the surveys undertaken regarding the previous Area Forums, provides helpful information regarding what an effective Community Forum may look like. For example, these could be organised by reference to a community of interest or theme, rather than as a geographically linked community as was the case historically. The digital technology that we now possess will enable us to travel to our communities to hold Community Forums, and to facilitate remote participation at the same time.
- 5.11 It is proposed that each Community Forum have a theme or limited number of themes for discussion. These may be given times on the agenda, to enable people to attend for items of interest to them. Officers could give a short presentation, followed by questions from those in attendance in person or remotely.
- 5.12 The early sessions could be used to obtain feedback from residents and other participants regarding themes or topics for consideration at future meetings. Discussion topics could also be selected by a combination of means: i.e. survey data, feedback, voting on the night for the next session etc.
- 5.13 The Council will promote the launch of the new Community Forums and specific events, via the Councils Newsletters, and via its social media channels. This will help to raise awareness and interest. Community Forums will also be promoted via the Council's website.
- 5.14 The Council held its first Community Forum on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2023, on the subject of proposed sports provision at Faraday Road. That event demonstrated the benefits of Community Forums, and provided a platform for many voices and opinions to be heard. This has also enabled the community to inform the Council of their aspirations for the future use of the Faraday Road facility.

### EAG Open Forum

- 5.15 As a result of discussions with the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity, a draft Terms of Reference for meetings of an EAG Open Forum have been developed, and these are attached at Appendix C.
- 5.16 The proposal put forward is that relevant interest groups be invited to participate in such meetings. Although members of the public will not be invited to attend these meetings, the proposal is to record the meetings, and for the recordings to be made available for the public to view which will enable more effective scrutiny of the business of the advisory group to take place.
- 5.17 It is considered that the EAG provides an important forum in which the Portfolio Holder can discuss the development or progress of sensitive policy or projects with other Members of West Berkshire Council. It is not therefore proposed that this body should

## Community Forums

cease to operate. It is proposed that EAG will therefore meet immediately before the EAG Open Forum. This will enable any confidential updates and discussions to take place, prior to the Open Forum.

5.18 The first EAG Open Forum was operated very successfully on 31<sup>st</sup> July, and a recording of that meeting has been published.

### Proposals

5.19 It is proposed that the new Community Forums be noted.

5.20 It is also proposed that the operation of the EAG Open Forum be noted.

5.21 It is recommended that the operation of these Forums be reviewed after the first year.

## 6 Other options considered

6.1 A review of similar activities in other authorities was undertaken, and details of the terms of reference for those bodies is included at Appendix D.

6.2 The Council could do nothing, and continue to operate as it is now. This is not recommended for the reasons detailed in the report.

## 7 Conclusion

7.1 The Community Forum and the EAG Open Forum will strengthen community engagement and help to ensure that the Council operates effectively, working with the communities it serves.

## 8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Review of Area Forums – Report to Council 23/09/2008

8.2 Appendix B – Terms of Reference – Community Forums

8.3 Appendix C – Terms of Reference – EAG Open Forum

8.4 Appendix D – Open Forum – Other examples

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### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position

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## Community Forums

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Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees,  
Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

### Officer details:

Name: Sarah Clarke  
Job Title: Service Director, Strategy & Governance  
Tel No: 01635 519596  
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---

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Review of Area Forums</b>	<b>Item 11</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Council	
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	23 September 2008	
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	C1642	

**Purpose of Report:**

To provide feedback on the consultation into the review of Area Forums and to consider the recommendations of the Area Forum Task Group.

**Recommended Action:**

That Council be requested to adopt the recommendation of the Area Forum Task Group set out below.

The Task Group recommended that:

- (a) District Parish Conferences to be enhanced and three or four meetings to be held per annum at different localities across the District and where appropriate arrangements be made for localised discussions to take place.
- (b) A new Public Engagement Model based on Members (both parties) and Officers attending and having a high profile presence at five events / locations a year to be introduced.
- (c) Individual Town and Parish Councils or groups be requested to consider whether they would wish to enhance their own public engagement model should they consider this to be relevant or appropriate.
- (d) In relation to participatory budgeting, further work be undertaken into the feasibility of introducing a locality based service delivery model to those areas in line with Corporate Priorities across the District.
- (e) Subject to the results of (d), the Executive be asked to review the existing Capital Grant system to enable resources to be directed in line with Corporate Priorities.
- (f) Further work be undertaken in relation to establishing Virtual Forums.
- (g) Any new engagement model introduced be subject to a review in eighteen months time.

- (h) **That Policy and Communication staff introduce appropriate measures to manage outstanding Area Forum actions and that Area Forums, in their current format, be discontinued forthwith.**
- (i) **The Overview and Scrutiny Commission be asked to monitor and review the outstanding Area Forum action plans to ensure completion.**

**Reason for decision to be taken:**

To ensure that the most appropriate public engagement model is in place which affords a larger number of residents to engage with the Council.

**Key background documentation:**

- Minutes of the Area Forum Review Task Group 04 June 2008.
- Minutes from the Area Forum Review Task Group on 17 July 2008
- Minutes of the Area Forum Review Task Group 26 August 2008
- Correspondence from Parish Councils and residents
- Developing the Kennet and Pang Area Forum to increase the involvement of the public and partner organisations. Evaluation of the pilot on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2006. (report to Corporate Board)

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Outcome(s):

**CPO12 - Including Everyone**

**CPO13 - Value for Money**

**CPO15 - Putting Customers First**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Themes and Outcomes by:

Agreeing innovative ways for the Council to engage Parish and Town Councils and local residents in the democratic process



Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Graham Jones Tel: (01235) 762744
E-mail Address:	gjones@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	1 September 2008

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Andy Day
Job Title:	Head of Policy and Communication
Tel. No.:	01635 519459
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### Implications

- Policy:** No policy implications but the relevant sections of the Constitution will need to be amended.
- Financial:** There will not be any additional financial implications for the Council. The cost of the new engagement model and additional District parish Conferences will be met from within existing Area Forum budgets. Should members be minded to adopt Ward Based or Locality Budgets these will be incorporated into the 2009/10 budget setting process.
- Personnel:** No additional staff will be required.
- Legal:** None
- Property:** None
- Risk Management:** None
- Equalities Impact Assessment:** None

<b>Is this item subject to call-in?</b>	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## Executive Summary

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At Annual Council on the 08<sup>th</sup> May 2008 a Motion was proposed and adopted requesting that a review of how effectively the Council was engaging and consulting residents takes place. A Task Group, comprising seven Members, was set up to review the effectiveness of the current Area Forum format.
- 1.2 The Democratic Services Manager wrote to all Parish and Town Council Clerks and asked them to comment on the effectiveness of Area Forums and any additional comments they would like to make. In addition comments were sought from residents via the individual forums and on the Council's website.
- 1.3 Despite attempts to engage all parishes in reviewing the effectiveness of Area Forums, only 14 of the 62 Parishes responded. Although some of the feedback supported the retention of Area Forums, other Parishes recognised the need to change the current model if greater public involvement was to be achieved.

### 2. Proposals

- 2.1 The Task Group, at its third and final meeting, concluded that as there is no statutory duty to hold Area Forum meetings an alternative model for engaging more broadly with the community should be adopted.
- 2.2 The Task Group's proposals are:
  - To enhance the District Parish Conference and increase the frequency of these meetings;
  - To adopt a New Public Engagement Model based on Members and Officers attending and having a high profile presence at a range of events and locations;
  - Town and Parish Councils enhancing their own public engagement models where they consider this to be appropriate;
  - Further research take place into introducing a locality based delivery model;
  - Further work be undertaken in relation to establishing Virtual Forums;
  - Officers continue to manage outstanding actions that have arisen at previous Forum meetings; and
  - The Overview and Scrutiny Commission review the outstanding Area Forum Action List in twelve months time.

### 3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Task Group agreed that Area Forums, in their current format, should be discontinued forthwith and that the effectiveness of the new model should be reviewed eighteen months after its inception.

## Executive Report

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council agreed to establish four Area Forums in July 2000 based on the existing Area Planning Sub-Committee boundaries (an additional forum meeting was established in 2004).
- 1.2 An Area Forum Task Group was set up in June 2003 to review if the Area Forums had accomplished what they had set out to achieve and to propose amendments to the Area Forum's Terms of Reference. The Task Group identified three critical success factors for Area Forums namely:
- (a) Increasing the level of attendance and interest from members of the public;
  - (b) Improving interest from local councils;
  - (c) Positively encouraging attendance.
- 1.3 At Annual Council on the 08th May 2008 the following Motion was proposed and adopted: "The Council wishes to consider the most beneficial ways of engaging and consulting with residents, and therefore intends to review the effectiveness of the current processes including the Area Forums. It is therefore proposed that the Area Forum meetings already publicised in May and June should continue as planned within the existing structures, pending the outcome of the proposed review which will be presented to full Council in September."
- 1.4 Following the Council meeting a Task Group, comprising 7 Members (5 Conservative and 2 Liberal Democrat) was set up with the following terms of reference:
- Ascertain the extent to which the functions of the forums as set out in the Constitution are being met;
  - Ascertain the effectiveness of the current working arrangements of Area Forums;
  - Establish the level of engagement from partner organisations;
  - To establish whether Area Forums provide Good Value for Money (Council Plan Outcome);
  - Consider other vehicles which engage residents and Parish/ Town Councils
- 1.5 In considering the critical success factors identified by the 2003 Task Group the following conclusions were reached:
- (a) Public attendance is variable from a handful to up to on occasions 60 people but that attendance across the five forums is generally low.
  - (b) With the exception of Thatcham Area Forum the majority of attendees at meetings are from Parish Councils. It should however be noted that the District Parish Conference which is currently held twice a year attracts 80 to 90 attendees.

- (c) Despite a range of attempts to increase attendance at meetings, within a limited budget, the level of attendance at meetings has remained fairly low.

1.6 Part 2 Article 9 (Paragraph 2.9.4 of the WBC Constitution) sets out the role of the Area Forum as follows:

- To be responsible for the preparation of an Area Action Plan in consultation with local people. This Action Plan to be incorporated as part of the development of the community planning process.
- To consider, monitor, scrutinise and make recommendations to the Executive or Policy Development Commissions and Overview and Scrutiny Commission, as appropriate, with respect to service delivery / performance of local services and facilities.
- To receive regular monitoring reports on service delivery in the area.
- To be consulted by the Council on major policy issues or changes to existing policies which have a significant impact on the area.
- To provide the opportunity for public participation and engagement by acting as a forum for discussion on matters of local interest and, in particular, to elicit/hear the views of local bodies, organisations.
- To foster, in relation to the area and its people, a close working relationship with Town and Parish Councils and other relevant agencies and bodies.
- To determine small grants to voluntary bodies operating primarily in the area and within the budget delegated to the Area Forum.
- To consider local minor highways issues falling within the Council's existing policy and within the Transport Management Works budget delegated to the Area Forum. (The budget for 2008/09 set by the Council on 4th March 2008 does not include any provision to allow Area Forums to implement schemes previously listed on the Traffic Management Works Programme.)
- To appoint to governing bodies of schools within the area of the Forum.
- To appoint representatives to outside bodies operating primarily within the area of the Forum.
- To promote liaison with local youth and community management committees in conjunction with local Area Youth Teams.
- To receive summary OfSTED reports for local schools.
- To consider proposals relating to the operation of local recreation facilities.
- To consider local community safety issues.
- To consider public questions and receive petitions about issues local to the Area.

1.7 In relation to the above roles and responsibilities, the Task Group will know that over time Area Forums are either no longer responsible for or other governance structures have been introduced for the following areas:

- (i) Safer Communities – The introduction of NAGs has seen many issues of Speeding traffic and Anti Social Behaviour being picked up by these community based groups.
- (ii) The determination of small grants to voluntary organisations is now undertaken by the Strategic Funding Group.

- (iii) The Transport Management Works Budget is no longer aligned with Area Forums.
- (iv) The appointment of School Governors is able to be determined by virtue of the Council's Individual Decision Making Scheme.
- (v) OfSTED reports are no longer considered by Area Forums.
- (vi) In relation to the preparation of area Action Plans this has now been integrated into the Parish Plan process and the Area Forums only role is to adopt them.

- 1.8 At its first meeting on the 04 June 2008 the Task Group reviewed the effectiveness of Area Forums and considered that a new model for public engagement was necessary in order to ensure that as many West Berkshire residents had the chance to ask questions or be appraised of particular issues within their locality.
- 1.9 Officers were also asked to provide feedback from the consultation, options for consideration in respect of the locations for the 'roadshows' and also to consider introducing a process for managing the continuity of outstanding actions.

## **2. Feedback from Consultation**

- 2.1 All Parish and Town Councils and Meetings were asked to provide feedback on the effectiveness of Area Forums and any comments they would like to make. The closing date for comments was the 31 July 2008 and responses were received from 14 of the 62 Parishes. A table setting out these comments is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.2 The responding Parishes stated, in the main, that the Area Forums provided a useful opportunity for communities and Councils to interact but acknowledged that attendance at meetings was low. It was noted that local government meetings did not generally attract residents though. Some of the Parishes suggested that perhaps the function of forums had not been clearly articulated to residents and many residents therefore viewed their Parish Council as the first point of contact and did not realise they had a similar vehicle at District level.
- 2.3 A number of Parishes suggested that specialist subject meetings might prove more popular. Comments also suggested that the formality and length of meetings might deter residents from attending.
- 2.4 Furthermore it was felt that the current area forum boundaries did not promote communities of interest which might impact negatively on attendance.
- 2.5 Parishes felt that wider publicity was needed to boost attendance at meetings. It should however be noted that posters advertising the forums are sent to all clerks to place on their noticeboards, meeting dates regularly published in the West Berkshire News (now 'A Great Place to Live'), press releases sent to the local newspaper and meetings, which are set annually, advertised on the Council's website. In addition agendas are sent to all attendees that sign in at meetings and indicate that they wish to receive them.

- 2.6 In October 2005 a pilot meeting of the Kennet and Pang Valley Area Forum was held in an attempt to increase attendance at the meetings. The purpose of the pilot was to consider the impact of a revised format and additional advertising on attendance. The meeting included an open session or "surgery" section where the public had the opportunity of having their issues dealt with face to face by representatives from the Council, Thames Valley Police and Voluntary and Community based groups. Despite vast numbers of leaflets being dropped through local residents' post boxes only 35 residents attended this meeting. It was therefore concluded that the amount of public who attended did not warrant the amount of staff resource and cost expended. Information received from the feedback forms returned did however suggest that the respondents judged the surgery style event to be either good or very good in terms of usefulness in accessing information
- 2.7 In addition comments from residents have been requested via the individual forums and on the Council's website. The Democratic Services Manager received 2 letters and a series of email from a resident addressed to the Leader of the Council. A summary of their comments is set Appendix B.
- 2.8 It should also be noted that at the Thatcham Area Forum meeting held on the 22 May 2008 "Members of the public voiced their strong disapproval and disappointment at the immediate suspension of the Forum. When asked if they opposed the suspension of the Forum it appeared that there was a consensus in favour of their continuation. Sue Everett proposed a petition and circulated it around the Forum; the petition would be placed at Thatcham Town Council if anybody else wished to sign it." (see Draft minutes from the meeting). This petition has not been submitted to West Berkshire Council for consideration.
- 2.9 It can be seen that despite attempts to engage all parishes in reviewing the effectiveness of Area Forums, only 14 of the 62 Parishes responded. Although some of the feedback supported the retention of Area Forums, other Parishes recognise the need to change the current model if greater public involvement was to be achieved.

### **3. The Way Forward**

- 3.1 A number of proposals for the future of Area Forums were discussed at meetings of the Review Task Group. It has been accepted that Area Forums should not continue in their present format as they have failed to capture the imagination of the vast majority of West Berkshire residents. Although the cost of running Area Forums is relatively low they do require significant human resources. The Task Group has concluded that, as there is no statutory duty to hold these meetings the Council needed to seek an alternative model for engaging more broadly with the community.

The proposals are set out below.

(1) District Parish Conference

The reintroduction of District Parish Conferences has greatly enhanced the relationship between the Council and the Parishes and regularly attracts 80/90 people for each meeting. Inadvertently the success of the conferences may have resulted in a slight decline in Parish Councillor attendance at Area

Forums. The Task Group noted a request from Parishes that they would like to 'retain the element where Parishes in small groupings could interact with Members and Officers' and will therefore put arrangements in place to hold localised discussions in smaller groups at the Conferences where this is deemed appropriate.

**Recommendation (a):**

**Parishes Conferences to be enhanced and three or four meetings to be held per annum at different localities across the District and where appropriate arrangements be made for localised discussions to take place.**

(2) **New Public Engagement Model**

Attendance at forum meetings remains relatively low. It is felt that the formality of the meetings and the location and accessibility issues could be a contributory factor. The Council having a local presence at a range of events and locations across the District may address this issue. Based on existing resources Officers have suggested limiting this to five key events per annum.

Suggested events include:

- the Crafty Raft Race in Newbury
- Royal County of Berkshire Show in Newbury
- Good Friday Open Day in Lambourn
- Holybrook Festival
- Hungerford and District Community Arts Festival

Suggested locations could also include:

- Kennet Centre in Newbury
- Kingsland Centre in Thatcham
- Markets (such as Farmers Market in Hungerford)
- Sainsbury's, Calcot

Members will consider the above list, make any further suggestions and then prioritise the events and locations that they would like Officers to explore further. A maximum of five events is recommended.

**Recommendation (b):**

**A new Public Engagement Model based on Senior Members (both parties) and Officers attending and having a high profile presence five events / locations a year to be introduced.**

(3) **Town and Parish Council Hosted Forums**

One of the issues raised by Parishes in respect of Area Forums is that the boundaries do not always reflect the communities served. In addition residents tended to refer matters directly to their Parish Councils that provided them with an immediate local connection. It was therefore

suggested that Parish and Town Councils could continue to run their own forums possibly held at the start of formal meetings which would provide public interface sessions if they so wished. Relevant Officers could attend when invited to do so.

**Recommendation (c):**

**Individual Town and Parish Councils or groups be requested to consider whether they would wish to enhance their own public engagement model should they consider this to be relevant or appropriate.**

**(4) Ward Based Budgeting**

The Task Group agreed that Ward Based Budgeting should be considered as a possible option for the Council. Further research is needed to examine such an option. Models, governance and financial implications would need to be considered outside of the Task Group. Any proposals relating to finance would have to be considered as part of the 2009/10 budget and approved by Council.

**Recommendation (d):**

**In relation to participatory budgeting, further work be undertaken into the feasibility of introducing a locality based service delivery model to those areas on most need across the District.**

**Recommendation(e):**

**Subject to the results of (d), the Executive be asked to review the existing Capital Grant system to enable more resources to be diverted in those areas in most need.**

**(5) Virtual Forum**

In an effort to reach residents that do not currently attend forums and that may not want to or have the opportunity to interact face to face with Members and Officers the possibility of hosting online forums on the Council's website to be investigated.

**Recommendation (f):**

**That further work be undertaken in relation to establishing Virtual Forums.**

**(6) Review of Effectiveness of New Model**

The Task Group has agreed that the effectiveness of any new proposals should be reviewed in eighteen months of their inception.

**Recommendation (g):**



**That any new engagement model introduced be subject to a review in eighteen months time.**

(7) Providing Continuity

The Task Group has agreed that Policy and Communications staff would manage outstanding Area Forum actions through to the end to ensure they were satisfactorily concluded. Some actions were long-term, others could be dealt with quite quickly. A database would be put onto the website, and would be managed by Policy and Communication.

**Recommendation (h):**

**That Policy and Communication staff introduce appropriate measures to manage outstanding Area Forum actions and that Area Forums, in their current format, be discontinued forthwith.**

**Recommendation (i):**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Commission to monitor and review the outstanding Area Forum action plans to ensure completion.**

**Appendices**

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Appendix A - Summary of Parish Council Comments

Appendix B - Summary of Residents' Comments

**Consultees**

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**Local Stakeholders:** All Parish/ Town Councils, Area Forum Attendees

**Officers Consulted:** Moira Fraser

**Trade Union:** Not consulted

## PARISH COUNCIL COMMENTS ON AREA FORUMS

Name	Parish Council	Comments
Bill Scott Clerk	Aldermaston Parish Council	The issue was discussed at its meeting on the 10 June and Councillors agreed not to make any comment.
Jackie Boxall Chairman	Brightwalton Parish Council	<p>I have only been chairman of Brightwalton for a year, so have only attended two forums.</p> <p>I found their use to me to be very limited. Understandably, there is so much that is not relevant to a small parish. As most people on the PC work, it is a big commitment to spend the whole evening for only one or two items of interest.</p>
		<p>Therefore, I suggest that it be made more flexible - easier to arrive and leave for just one or two agenda items. At the moment it is very formal - refreshments, formal presentations with slides etc. which makes it hard to dip in and out.</p> <p>Also, the presentations are poor - you can't read the slides and presenters just read the script off the slide - all very old fashioned and boring. You don't get away with that in business!</p>
		So, less formal, able to come and go for items of interest, more discussion and fewer slides.
Sandi Ackrill Clerk	Chaddleworth Parish Council	The PC is concerned about the possibility of the demise of Area Forums, they find them to be informative and a great source of communication,
John Perou Member of Parish Council	Chaddleworth Parish Council	I would only add that for me the Forums really are the way for communities and councils to connect, raise, discuss and resolve issues to the collective benefit. So much better and effective for all parties, rather than being bombarded and overpowered with one way communication of endless reports, surveys.
Denise Hudspith Clerk	Cold Ash	Further to your letter sent to all Parish and Town Councils on 2 June, Cold Ash PC regularly attends the Area Forums and feels strongly that these should continue. We do believe, however, that the forums are under-utilised as a vehicle for the public to air its views and feel this is due in part to poor publicity. Parish Councils encourage parishioners to attend their Council meetings to put their points of view across or raise a matter of concern, but we believe not many members of the public realise they have a similar vehicle at District level. Perhaps they could be better advertised in the local newspaper or by leaflets in the same

Name	Parish Council	Comments
Rachel Sinton Clerk	Compton Parish Council	<p>way as the services of Streetcare are promoted? Cold Ash PC does post the notices on its notice boards but we would guess that many more people read newspapers than our notices! We hope you find this comment useful and look forward to hearing the outcome of the review.</p> <p>The parish Council supports Area Forums as they believe them to be positive for the community</p>
Anne Ray Clerk	Lambourn Parish Council	<p>Thank you for updating Council about the review of Area Forums in West Berkshire. Lambourn Parish Council discussed the review at its meeting last week. It deplored the potential loss of Forums as they are a useful way to put parishioner's views direct to the District Council. It is recognised that there are problems with the current running of the Forums and Council proposed that officials should not overload the agenda with long reports, thus shortening the meetings and is leaving enough time for questions from attendees. I hope that these comments are of use to you.</p>
Angela Sutton Parish Plan Co-ordinator and Parish Clerk	Leckhampstead Parish Council	<p>In response to your letter of 2 June, it seems likely that our Parish Councillors will be responding individually. From my perspective, they would appear to have been useful in getting action taken on a number of issues. It is very difficult to get ordinary members of the public involved and, in any case, if there are issues then the correct place to go is first to your Parish Council and then to your district councillor. If this procedure is not adhered to then there is the distinct risk of actions being agreed without the Parish Council being notified which surely cannot be correct. Is there an element of trying to find things for the Area Forums to take on? Do we need another layer of authority? Probably not! Liaison and accessibility with West Berkshire Council has improved a lot over the last four or five years and particularly as a result of the involvement by WBC with the Parish Plan process and the surgeries which have been held. Hope these comments are useful.</p>
Graham Hunt Chief Executive Officer	Newbury Town Council	<p>At its Council meetings last night, Newbury Town Council made the following suggestions with regard to the future of Area Forums. It was a long discussion and I've tried to pick out the key suggestions (recorded in no particular order) to help move the debate forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) A forum of some sort is required to enable members of the public to have their say (or ask questions) on any topic.</li> <li>(b) A forum is a useful way of the Council getting feedback.</li> <li>(c) The boundaries should reflect the communities served.</li> <li>(d) Each forum should have a theme – but not be constrained by it.</li> <li>(e) Forums could be created on demand around topical issues (i.e. not a rigid timetable)</li> </ul>

Name	Parish Council	Comments
Rick Jones, Chairman	Purley on Thames Parish Council	<p>(f) Some kind of appropriate budget to support the work of the forum is required – to encourage action.</p> <p>(g) It would be useful if more meetings could be out and about in the community – closer to the public.</p> <p>(h) It should reflect and cater for the other meetings that take place – in some cases with similar purposes.</p> <p>(i) Their needs to be even greater/wider publicity to encourage greater attendance.</p> <p>(j) Ward Councillor attendance should be required, not optional.</p> <p>(k) Like the presence of senior officers.</p> <p>(l) Can the Town help in any way – we are keen to help – and work in partnership.</p> <p>(m) More open petition processing.</p> <p>(n) Two part format does not engage well with the public.</p> <p>(o) Reduce the formality – make it easier for the public to express themselves.</p> <p>(p) Be open to ideas.</p> <p>(q) There is no harm in trying things again – even if they haven't worked before.</p> <p>Newbury Town Council would like to be consulted on any final options proposed before implementation.</p> <p>Felt that the purpose of area forums was twofold namely to bring the District to the people and to focus on local needs and priorities.</p> <p>Accepted that attendance at meetings was low</p> <p>Urged the Council not to lose local focus when attempting to engage the public. Noted that local government meetings did not attract residents unless there was something controversial on the agenda</p> <p>Felt that the forums were not as well recognised as a place for the public voice as the District of Parish Council.</p> <p>Felt that NAGs had taken over the Community Safety role locally very well</p> <p>Would like to retain the element where parishes in a small grouping could interact with Members and Officers to enable local issues to be addressed</p> <p>To enhance public engagement they suggested specialist subject meetings and dissemination of information and consultation by post</p>
Mrs Jayne Kirk Clerk	Stratfield Mortimer Parish Councillor	<p>Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council have asked me to write to you in reply to your letter of 2 June regarding the review of Area Forums. The Council would like the Area Forums to continue as they feel they are a good conduit between the electorate and the District</p>

Name	Parish Council	Comments
Angela Bates Community/ Civic Manager	Thatcham Town Council	<p>Council.</p> <p>The issue was discussed at an extraordinary meeting held on the 23 June 2008 The Town Council resolved that Thatcham Town Council registers its strong disapproval of the decision by West Berkshire Council to suspend the Area Forums before the Review Group has been able to see the Forums in action and urges West Berkshire Council to reinstate the cycle of Forum meetings until the Review Group presents its report. And RESOLVED that Thatcham Town Council demands that the Thatcham Area Forum itself should not be discontinued until a major public consultation exercise has been undertaken.</p>
Richard Crumly District and Town Councillor for Thatcham Central	Thatcham Town Council	<p>Believes Area Forums should be discontinued. Two incidents immediately spring to mind. In Harts Hill Road there was a petition presented to the Area Forum for a build out at the entrance to Bradley Moore Square, passed by vote and then put into effect. There appears to be no other democratic process. It was certainly at no time ever presented to Thatcham Town Council. The first we knew about it was when the blooming thing was erected. Area Forums therefore seem to bypass established democratic institutions. As far as I know, the matter was not further considered by West Berks Council.</p> <p>There was a petition presented to Thatcham Area Forum on or about 22nd May for another crossing and another build out is proposed further down Harts Hill Road at the junction with Vincent Road. Once again, it went before the Area Forum and was passed and the presumption then was that it would be put into effect. It did come before Thatcham Town Council Planning for comment and observation and collectively we were against a build out and we are currently in correspondence with the officer over a counter proposal.</p> <p>In my view, any proposals such as this should originate with the Town Council and be considered by the District Council and officers and signed off by the appropriate portfolio holder. Therefore, I am of the view that Area Forums should be stripped of both their powers and their budgets.</p>
Miss M.J. Rueth Clerk	Theale Parish Council	<p>Felt that forum meetings which addressed subjects that engaged the attention of local residents were well attended but accepted that some forums did not have a larger attendance Felt that wider publicity was needed in order to boost attendance rather than eliminate</p>

Name	Parish Council	Comments
		forums. Felt that forums were one of the few events where the public had the opportunity to address Councillors, Council Officers and Police Officers
Liz Best Clerk of the Council	Tilehurst Parish Council	My members made the following comments at this week's full Council Meeting:- The cost of running the forums appeared relatively low. Is a means of providing localised funding for small projects although it is recognised that some of this is now dealt with by Neighbourhood Action Groups. Would be useful for an advance schedule of meeting dates and venues.
David Hunt, Chairman	Welford Parish Council	Feel that Area Forums serve a useful purpose, Feel it is valuable to meet Parish and District Councillors from a similar rural area Improvements could be made by a clearer idea of the function of forums, better advertising and larger venues if you want to attract public, clearer picture of requests that go through forums and those that should go directly to the District Council, purpose of forums having their own monies needs to be explained There is real difficulty in engaging people in local issues, the PC provides an immediate local connection with local residents and they would therefore not expect the forums to attract many residents Welcome initiatives to maximise their efficiency.

## Residents Comments:

Resident	Summary of Comments
Mr Dunn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main objective of the existence of Area Forums is as venue for public input.</li> <li>• Request that Area Forums are reconvened.</li> </ul>
Mr Knight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to substantially increase and protect the position of the Ward Councillors as the prime focus for community contact.</li> <li>• Ward Members credibility and influence is substantially diminished by special or sectional interest groups who are able to avoid the normal democratic process by going directly to the Executive.</li> <li>• Case in point is the introduction of NAGs, these have laudable aims and can exert a positive influence, however membership appears to be restricted and their constitutions are created outside the usual democratic process and they can therefore not claim to be the voice of the people.</li> <li>• The power of the Ward Member should not be eroded.</li> </ul>
Mr Bovington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewed them as a vital mechanism for members of the public to find out about local issues, be able to ask questions of their councillors, to also be able to question council officers and to be able to influence local issues. Without these forums I am not sure how members of the public will be able to do this. Surely the council should be encouraging more interaction with the public rather than trying to remove it.</li> <li>• At the forum last night we were able to hear from the council officers who are planning and co-ordinating flood alleviation works and also question officials from Thames Water who are also undertaking works. As such I was able to find out a great deal more of what is being done and passed on this information to a number of my neighbours who couldn't make the meeting. Surely this is how local democracy should work.</li> <li>• Have no issues with a review taking place, though I believe such forums or similar mechanisms are necessary.</li> </ul>

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## Contents

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### 1. Purpose of Community Forums

- 1.1 West Berkshire Council is committed to working with our residents and communities to ensure that together, we can make West Berkshire an even better place in which to live, work and learn.
- 1.2 Community Forums will provide an opportunity to discuss issues of significance to communities in West Berkshire, and will provide an opportunity for residents, businesses and others to ask questions. These Forums will ensure that the Executive hears the voices of those living, working or learning in the community.
- 1.3 Community Forums will be chaired by one of the Council's Portfolio Holders, and at least one senior officer will attend every Forum, depending on the focus of the discussion topics. Other councillors, and relevant officers may also attend Community Forums.
- 1.4 Community Forums will provide an opportunity for the community to contribute to, and support the Executive in the development of proposals. The Community Forum does not have any decision making powers, and any significant decisions will be taken by the Executive.
- 1.5 Other participants could include:
  - *Local residents*
  - *Local businesses*
  - *Parish Councils*
  - *Local residents associations representatives*
  - *Special interest groups*
  - *Voluntary organisations*
  - *Others - Police / Health*

## 2. **Terms of Reference**

- 2.1 Community Forums will provide an opportunity for open and effective communication between the Council and those living, working and learning in the district on matters of significant interest to them.
- 2.2 By open and honest conversations, the Community Forum will help to identify opportunities for communities to work together and with the Council, to deliver the best outcomes for those communities. Officers will assist these conversations by providing professional advice.
- 2.3 The Community Forum will provide an opportunity for communities to ask questions of Members of the Executive and senior officers, regarding issues that affect them.
- 2.4 The Community Forum will enable the Council to provide information and to engage with the community about significant activities and projects being delivered by the Council.
- 2.5 To consider any other items within the control or reasonable influence of the Council, at the discretion of the Chairman.

## 3. **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 3.1 The Executive Portfolio Holder will consider the items and opportunities discussed at the Community Forum. The Community Forum is not a decision making body any proposals that the Council take a particular action would need to be considered via the appropriate decision making route.
- 3.2 The Senior Officer in attendance will ensure that recommendations are fed back to the Council and given due consideration. Information regarding action taken should be made public so that individuals attending Community Forums are kept updated about progress.
- 3.3 All participants will be expected to behave in a respectful way to others participating in the meeting.

## 4. **Meeting arrangements**

- 4.1 *Meetings will be held at least 4 times per year, and ideally should not last more than 2 hours.*
- 4.2 *Meetings will usually be held at various community locations in West Berkshire.*
- 4.3 *Meetings will be in private but will be recorded and the recordings will be made available for viewing.*
- 4.4 *Any partner body giving a presentation will normally be asked to submit this in advance. Recordings of meetings, and action logs will be made public.*

*The Council will normally respond to any matters raised which are not responded to fully during the meeting, within 4 weeks of the Community Forum taking place. Updates will be provided via the Council website.*

## Document Control

<b>Document Ref:</b>	EAG Open Forum ToR	<b>Date Created:</b>	June 2023
<b>Version:</b>	0.1	<b>Date Modified:</b>	
<b>Revision due</b>			
<b>Author:</b>	S Clarke	<b>Sign &amp; Date:</b>	
<b>Owning Service</b>	Environment		

## Change History

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Change ID</b>
0.1	June 2023	Draft for consultation with Exec Members	PA

*This Strategy is not for publication externally*

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## Contents

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1. **Purpose of Environment Advisory Group Open Forum**
- 1.1 The Environment Advisory Group (EAG) Open Forum will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity. The EAG Open Forum is an advisory body, and has no decision making powers.
- 1.2 Other councillors and representatives of relevant external organisations will form a panel at each meeting of the EAG Open Forum to present and participate in the discussion.
- 1.3 The Open Forum will advise and inform the Portfolio Holder on opportunities and challenges relating to the Council's Environment Strategy and associated strands including enhanced recycling and biodiversity, and its commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 1.4 The Environment Advisory Group (EAG) is a working group of Councillors that supports the the delivery of the Environment Strategy, associated projects and any other high profile district-wide environmental issues. The EAG does not have any decision making powers and any significant decisions will be taken by the Executive .
- 1.5 The EAG Open Forum will ensure that the Executive hears the alternative voices of interested parties, who will be invited to participate in Open Forum discussions.

## 2. **Membership**

The EAG Open Forum will consist of the following:

1. Executive Member or Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity (Chairman)
2. Members of EAG
3. Representatives from Interested parties / groups by invitation of the Chairman such as:
  - a. *Local climate action groups or individuals with such interests*
  - b. *Environmental conservation community groups or individuals with such interests*
  - c. *Recycling and biodiversity promotion groups, charities or individuals with such interests*
  - d. *West Berkshire Parish Climate Forum*
4. Officers, normally including:
  - a. Executive Director – Place
  - b. Service Director – Environment
  - c. Service Lead – Climate Change
  - d. Managers from the Climate Change Service

Other members (Councillors) of West Berkshire Council will be entitled to attend any meeting of the EAG Open Forum with the permission of the Chairman. Similarly, other officers may be invited to attend specific meetings, depending on the agenda.

## 3. **Terms of Reference**

- 3.1 To advise, inform and provide feedback to the relevant Portfolio Holder on local, regional and national environmental issues and projects. International perspectives and ideas may also be discussed, where practicable.
- 3.2 To consider available evidence, innovations and best practice for carbon neutrality, climate resilience and environmental sustainability, and recommending appropriate actions.
- 3.3 To provide and identify opportunities, working with partners as appropriate, including individuals and community groups of interest, the public sector, academia, farming and businesses, to deliver the Council's targets.
- 3.4 Promoting environmental initiatives, sharing information, guidance and best practice for Parish Councils and local community groups wanting to help shift towards zero carbon lifestyle. The flow of information and expertise is expected to be two-way, with the Council also learning from initiatives generated within the local community. Where practicable, relevant findings from the West Berkshire Parish Climate Forum will be brought to the attention of the EAG Open Forum.
- 3.5 To receive updates on activities and projects being delivered by or on behalf of the Council.

3.6 To consider any other items as deemed pertinent by the Chairman.

#### **4. Roles and Responsibilities**

4.1 The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity will consider the items and opportunities discussed at the EAG Open Forum. No decision will be taken at the EAG Open Forum, as any proposals would need to be considered by a formal decision making body, having regard to any legal, financial or other resourcing implications.

4.2 Officers will be responsible for contributing constructively to strategic conversations held at the EAG Open Forum. Representatives or individuals attending (as outlined in the Membership section) will be responsible for bringing ideas and innovations, updates or challenges and contributing to discussions in a positive and collaborative way.

#### **5. Meeting arrangements**

5.1 EAG Open Forum meetings will be held up to 6 times per year for up to 2 hours per meeting.

5.2 Each meeting will normally be held virtually or in-person in the Council's Offices on Market Street, Newbury.

5.3 Meetings will be in private but will be recorded and the recordings will be made available for viewing.

5.4 Agendas should be issued at least 7 days in advance by the nominated meeting clerk or the Service Lead – Climate Change. Any partner body giving a presentation should submit this in advance to the nominated meeting clerk or the Service Lead – Climate Change.

5.5 Minutes will not be produced but actions will be recorded.

5.6 Members should declare any interests as outlined in the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

## Document Control

<b>Document Ref:</b>	EAG Open Forum ToR	<b>Date Created:</b>	June 2023
<b>Version:</b>	0.1	<b>Date Modified:</b>	
<b>Revision due</b>			
<b>Author:</b>	S Clarke	<b>Sign &amp; Date:</b>	
<b>Owning Service</b>	Environment		

## Change History

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Change ID</b>
0.1	June 2023	Draft for consultation with Exec Members	PA

*This Strategy is not for publication externally*





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## **Winchester City Council – Carbon Neutrality Open Forum**

[Committee details - Carbon Neutrality Open Forum - Winchester City Council](#)

The Open Forum will be chaired by the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency. Other councillors and representatives of external partner organisations will form a panel at each meeting to present and take part in the debate.

## **South Cambridgeshire DC – Climate & Environment Advisory Committee**

[Browse meetings - Climate and Environment Advisory Committee \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

To advise Cabinet on policies, actions and resources required to deliver on the Council's climate change and environmental ambitions, and to provide updates on progress towards achieving agreed targets and outcomes.

This will include, but not be limited to:

- Considering, taking account of available evidence and best practice, innovations and best practice for zero carbon, climate resilience and environmental sustainability, and recommending appropriate actions
- Investigating specific climate and environment-related issues and, where appropriate, organising informal Member workshops to review the evidence and recommendations
- Reviewing the development of Council strategies and roadmaps/action plans for carbon reductions, climate resilience, biodiversity and environmental sustainability; making recommendations for their adoption; updating Cabinet on progress with implementation and recommending any mitigating actions necessary
- Reviewing relevant strategic policies, decisions, future plans, corporate budgets and green investments to ensure that they are in line with a shift to zero carbon and environmental sustainability taking account also of fairness and cost implications
- Reviewing development of new Greater Cambridge Local Plan to ensure it fulfills its role in bringing forward net zero carbon development together with biodiversity and green spaces, particularly in new housing and infrastructure, as well as ensuring that new development can adapt to our changing climate
- Providing leadership on climate change and sustainability, working with partners, as appropriate, to deliver the Council's targets, including public sector, academia, communities, farming and businesses
- Promoting and facilitating the Zero Carbon Communities network, sharing information, guidance and best practice for Parish Councils and local community groups wanting to help shift towards zero carbon lifestyle
- Reviewing the internal operations of the Council with a view to promoting zero carbon and sustainability, adopting best practice and strengthening the Council's environmental performance, with a view to being an 'exemplar council'?

- Influencing and interpreting county, regional and national policy for the benefit of South Cambridgeshire?
- Making recommendations on bids for funding relating to climate change, tree planting and the protection and enhancement of nature.

### **Vale of White Horse – Climate Emergency Advisory Committee**

[Committee details - Climate Emergency Advisory Committee \(whitehorsedc.gov.uk\)](http://whitehorsedc.gov.uk)

#### Purpose of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee

1. The committee is an advisory committee with no delegated decision making.
2. To advise Cabinet on matters relating to the climate emergency and environmental sustainability including, but not limited to:
  - (a) Reviewing and making recommendations on ways in which the council can reduce damage to the global and local environment through its policies and practices.
  - (b) Reviewing the internal operations of the council with a view to promoting sustainability, adopting best practice and strengthening the council's environmental performance.
  - (c) Providing community leadership on the climate emergency and sustainability, facilitating and engaging public sector partners, businesses, community groups and the public.
  - (d) Advising on how the council can contribute to delivery of
    - national legally-binding targets on the climate emergency
    - countywide targets on the climate emergency through the Oxfordshire Environment Partnership
    - the council's own targets on the climate emergency
    - the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy Delivery Plan
  - (e) Making recommendations on bids for external funding relating to the climate emergency.

### **Oxford City Council – Climate and Environment Panel (Panel of Scrutiny)**

[Committee details - Climate and Environment Panel \(Panel of the Scrutiny Committee\) | Oxford City Council](#)

### **Bath & NE Somerset Council –**

#### **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel**

Overview & Scrutiny is the name given to the system of checks and balances implemented to monitor and review the activity of the Cabinet and also assist them in developing policy.

Overview & Scrutiny has two key roles:

#### **Overview:**

- To assist the Council and Cabinet in the development of new policy

- To assist the Cabinet by giving comments on issues identified as "Key Decisions" prior to a decision being made
- To contribute to major service reviews at scoping and "key issues" stages
- To assist the Cabinet by giving comments on selected Service & Budget Plans at their draft stage

**Scrutiny:**

- Scrutinise performance management information to ensure that the Council is performing to agreed targets and to agreed Action Plans
- Determine "call-ins" of decisions made but not yet implemented by the Cabinet or an officer
- Scrutinise particular "Key Decisions" and other aspects of Cabinet activity to ensure compliance with agreed Council policies and plans.
- Evaluate the impact of Council and or Cabinet decisions and policies

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# Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey

<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Jeff Brooks
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	1 September 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Gordon Oliver
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4378

## 1 Purpose of the Report

To provide a response to the recommendations made in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) Task and Finish Group on the Customer Journey, which was presented to Members of the OSMC in March 2023.

## 2 Recommendation

For the Executive to agree the proposed action plan that has been developed in response to the recommendations raised by the Task and Finish Group.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have financial implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	There are no HR implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have HR implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.

**Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey**

<b>Legal:</b>	There are no Legal implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Legal implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	The recommended actions do not introduce any significant new risks for the Council at this stage. Some actions may affect risks to the Council if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Property:</b>	There are no Property implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Property implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Policy:</b>	There are no Policy implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Property implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		There are no inequality impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have implications for inequalities if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		There are no impacts for people with protected characteristics arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have implications for inequalities if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.



**Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey**

<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		There are no environmental impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have environmental impacts if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		There are no health impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have environmental impacts if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		None.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		There are no impacts on Digital Services arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Any impacts associated with individual actions would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	X			<p>The proposals outlined in this report support the following outcomes under the 'Building Public Services for the Future' priority in the draft Council Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality public services for all (compared to all local authorities in England)</li> <li>• Continually improving customer experience and enable digital access option to services for the residents that want and can access them in this way</li> <li>• Successful implementation of our new Customer Charter</li> </ul>
<b>Core Business:</b>	X			If implemented, the recommendations would deliver benefits across a wide range of services involved in delivering the core business of the Council.

<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		None
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>Relevant officers have been consulted, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Coe (Interim Executive Director – People)</li> <li>• Eric Owens (Service Director – Development and Regulation)</li> <li>• Jon Winstanley (Service Director – Environment)</li> <li>• Andy Best (Acting Head of ICT)</li> <li>• Gabrielle Mancini (Acting Service Director - Transformation)</li> <li>• Martin Dunscombe (Communications Team Manager)</li> <li>• Susan Powell (Building Communities Together Team Manager)</li> <li>• Carolyn Richardson (Service Manager – Joint Emergency Planning Unit)</li> <li>• Phil Rumens (Digital Services Manager)</li> </ul>			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Customer Journey Task Group was created in March 2022 to look at the customer journey across both office hours and out-of-hours services.
- 4.2 The OSMC received the final report in March 2023 and requested that this be referred to the Executive for consideration. An action plan has been developed against each of the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations, which sets out the proposed responses to the Task Group’s recommendations.
- 4.3 It should be noted that some of the report’s recommendations have already been implemented, and in some cases, the issues identified in the Task and Finish Group’s report have been addressed through other mechanisms, such as the outcomes of services reviews / transformation, or through contract retendering.
- 4.4 For some of the Task Group recommendations, further work is required in order to test the business case, or else it is recommended that proposals should not be implemented due to the lack of a clear business case or due to other legal or practical considerations.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 At its meeting on 22 March 2022, OSMC established a Task and Finish Group to look at the customer journey across office hours and out-of-hours services. Terms of reference were drafted with the help of senior officers, and the scope was broken down into four main parts as follows:
  - Part 1: Out of Hours Emergency Contact Centre and Response

## Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey

- Part 2: Office hours customer contacts
- Part 3: Office hours customer contacts (other local authorities)
- Part 4: Good practice and recommendations

5.2 The full Terms of Reference are provided in Appendix A.

5.3 The Task and Finish Group met 12 times between April 2022 and January 2023. An initial interim report on the Out of Hours Contact Centre was presented to the OSMC meeting on 24 May 2022. A second interim report was presented to the OSMC on 29 November 2022, which set out the Task and Finish Group's preliminary findings, with the final report presented to the OSMC on 7 March 2023.

5.4 The report set out a series of 42 recommendations. Although the Task and Finish Group considered that all of these recommendations were important, an indicative prioritisation system has been used to highlight the actions that the Task and Finish Group considered most important.

### Proposals

5.5 Following a review of the recommendations, a proposed action plan has been prepared to respond to the points raised. This is set out in Appendix B of this report.

## 6 Other options considered

6.1 The Executive could choose not to approve some or all of the proposed action plan, however, it is important to respond to Member concerns about the customer journey where action has not already been taken in respect of the issues raised.

## 7 Conclusion

7.1 The proposed Action Plan responds to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, taking account of any actions that have already been implemented, as well as alternative courses of action that respond to the issues identified, which have been developed in response to recent service reviews and transformation activity.

## 8 Appendices

Appendix A – Customer Journey Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Proposed actions in response to the Task and Finish Group recommendations

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### Background Papers:

Customer Journey – Out of Hours, OSMC, 24 May 2022

Customer Journey Task Group – Interim Report, OSMC, 29 November 2022

Customer Journey Task Group – Final Report, OSMC, 7 March 2023

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**Subject to Call-In:**

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** All wards

**Officer details:**

Name: Gordon Oliver  
Job Title: Principal Policy Officer (Democratic Services and Scrutiny)  
Tel No: 01635 519486  
E-mail: [Gordon.Oliver1@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:Gordon.Oliver1@westberks.gov.uk)

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## Overview and Scrutiny Review Matrix

**Review Topic: Customer Journey – inside and outside office hours, including out of hours emergency response.**

**Timescale**  
**Start: Apr 2022**  
**Finish: Sep 2022**

### Review Rationale:

West Berkshire Council strives to deliver the best possible customer experience regardless of the channel chosen to contact us and when they contact the Council.

On two occasions in the past year, elected members have highlighted issues relating to contacting relevant officers and the subsequent escalation process, which has led to OSMC seeking a review of both the Customer Services contact centre and the Emergency Out of Hours Service.

Some considerations of this review may be:

- a. How do residents prefer to interact with the council?
- b. What do residents expect and value when they interact with the Council as customers?
- c. What is the experience of disabled residents when they contact the Council?
- d. How can both Members and Officers understand and improve understanding of the customer's wants and needs?
- e. What Council Services are provided out of hours and how are they provided?
- f. How has our relationship with customers been impacted by the pandemic and subsequent new work styles?
- g. How can we effectively link an improved customer journey with benefits to communities on the ground?
- h. How can we use our customer service channels to improve community capacity, capability and participation?
- i. Is customer experience consistent across all available channels?
- j. Is there an organisation-wide commitment to good customer experience?
- k. What best practice or learning can we gather from other local authorities?

### Terms of Reference:

The Task and Finish Group will:

- **Part 1:** Out of Hours Emergency Contact Centre and Response

*Consider whether the Council's Out of Hours service offers an effective and consistent customer experience*

This element of the review will be undertaken by:

- Reviewing how customers can contact the council out of hours
- Reviewing the Service areas deemed to require an out of hours response and how this is or could be provided
- Reviewing the on call duty rota arrangements (including budgets) across the Council including those with authority to act on the councils behalf.
- Reviewing how the Emergency Duty Officers escalate an emergency situation out of hours along with key stakeholders.

- **Part 2:** Office hours customer contacts

*Review the customer experience, and how the Council's systems and customer service channels work, to understand if they are effective and delivering a positive and efficient service.*

This element of the review will be undertaken by:

- Holding facilitated meetings with the 5 highest contact volume departments or service areas to understand how enquiries are followed from initial point of contact in Customer Services to other areas of the Council.
- Members will review performance reports for Customer Services, complaints reports, Residents Survey results and other data available in order to analyse effectiveness.
- Mystery shopping activities will be undertaken (subject to budget availability) for a sample of standard queries / scenarios and for different user groups, including disabled users.
- West Berkshire Council Members, external partners and local representative groups will be surveyed to understand their customer journey experiences and to uncover any relevant issues / concerns that have been communicated to them by residents / service users. Survey responses may be followed up with interviews where necessary to explore issues in more depth.

- **Part 3:** Office hours customer contacts

*Consider whether systems and processes can be improved to enhance customer experience, whilst considering cost implications*

This element of the review will be undertaken by having regard to the conclusions of part two and:

- Members will review details of customer experience approaches from other local authority areas. (This information will be collated by the Service Lead - Customer Engagement and Transformation and the Performance, Risk and Consultation Manager.)

- **Part 4:**

*Highlight areas of good practice and make recommendations as to how improvements might be made*

Members will collate their findings which will then form the basis of a report to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

**Review Membership:**

Lib Dem Member Lee Dillon  
CouncillorCarolyn Culver  
Councillor Biyi Oloko

**Chairman:** Councillor James Cole

**Vice-Chairman:** TBC

**Scrutiny Officer:** Gordon Oliver

**Information Required:**

Contact centre call volume and answering data  
Website visit data  
Service level performance data  
Interviews with officers from service areas within the scope of the review

**Documents/Evidence:**

Residents Survey outcome report (2020 and 2021)  
Quarterly reporting for relevant service areas  
SLA for out of hours service and scope for re-tendering

**Witnesses:** *(Who/Why?)*

Emergency Planning Manager  
Performance, Research and Consultation Manager  
Managers of services with highest number of customer contacts  
Elected Members  
External partners  
Local representative groups

**Measures Available**

Suite of contact centre and website data including survey results, as outlined above

**Desired Outcomes:**

- 1.
- 2.

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## Part 1: Out of Hours Emergency Centre and Response

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
1	In order to help the OOH Contact Centre to locate incidents reported by customers, they could consider using the 'What 3 Words' app to allow locations to be pin-pointed to a 3m x 3m square. This is already used by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and is particularly useful in locating a problem that is not at a particular address point. This is considered to be a quick win.	Medium	JEPU	The OOH contact centre is now using What 3 Words where callers can give the information.	Accepted - Complete
2	When a customer calls the main Council number out of hours, there should be options that the customer can select so the call is transferred to the relevant OOH Service. This would mean that customers would not have to note down the number and redial.	High	JEPU and Contact Centre	This is being investigated and will be incorporated into the new phone system which is due to go live in Autumn 2023. Otherwise there would be a cost to the Council to change and then change again.	Accepted - In progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
3	A pop-up banner should automatically be generated on the Council's website via a timed script when the offices are closed. This would help customers looking for information about the OOH Contact Centre.	High	JEPU and Digital Team	<p>In the past when the council has used a pop-up banner on its website customer sentiment has generally been negative</p> <p>This would detract from the journey given the relatively small number of customers who are looking to find the number for the OOH Contact Centre.</p> <p>It is possible to add a banner that does not "pop up" to the home page, which will only be displayed out of office hours. This would be less intrusive so therefore not as disruptive to the customer experience and meet accessibility legislation.</p> <p>This could increase demand on the OOH Contact Centre, especially from customers using the number to contact the council for non-emergencies out of hours so this should be monitored.</p>	Accepted - In progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
4	Information about how to report emergency incidents out of hours should be disseminated via town / parish council websites, newsletters and noticeboards. Other opportunities should also be investigated, such as information on existing signage in public locations. This is considered a quick win.	Low	JEPU and Comms Team	This will tie in with the update to the website and the phone system changes as part of the communications relating to it.  Many parishes display this already. Town and parish comms sit with the BCT team.	Accepted - In progress
5	Consider how social media could be used to disseminate information about emergency incidents to the public, e.g. with a feed to the Council's home page. This would help to inform residents that the OOH Service is aware of an incident, and to communicate related messages about diversion routes, and when the incident has been resolved. It is recognised that there would be an additional cost for this service.	Medium	JEPU and Comms Team	This is being considered however it will be reliant on a Comms Officer on call which is not the case at the moment and therefore a cost.  It is used in this way when incidents happen. However, as the action notes this has a cost implication for the service and Comms are not resourced to allow for a formal out of hours service.	Being investigated
6	Consider formalising processes around Planning Enforcement arrangements (e.g. circulation of lists of officers who would be available over Bank Holiday weekends).	Medium	Development and Regulation	Officers do not work on bank holiday weekends at present. However, even if available during these times, urgent planning enforcement action to stop development requires permission through the Courts that are not open on bank holiday weekends.	Not to be progressed at this time

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
7	Take action to increase the number of Emergency Duty Officers to at least 10, and seek to maintain numbers at this level thereafter.	High	JEPU	Completed and will be on-going	Accepted - Complete
8	Consider giving the EDO number to Members, so they can get hold of the relevant person in the event of an emergency.	Medium	JEPU	The established process is to contact the OOH Contact Centre when an incident occurs. Each incident is assessed and only escalated to an EDO when a specific threshold is met. Providing the contact details of an EDO to members would circumvent the system and lead to inefficient and ineffective response.	Not to be progressed at this time
9	Ensure there is provision for customer satisfaction surveys and mystery shopping exercises for the Emergency Out of Hours Contact Centre. This would help ensure that quality standards are maintained and the service meets customer expectations.	Medium	JEPU	This is being considered with the OOH contact centre contractor and Legal as to the process.	Being investigated
10	Changes should be made to the Out of Hours Service Manual escalation process to ensure that customers receive a call-back from a senior officer in response to ongoing issues if they have not been resolved after a defined period of time.	High	JEPU	This is now being embedded	Accepted – In Progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
11	The option of having the Council's Contact Centre Manager managing the Emergency Out of Hours contract should be explored, since there are strong synergies between the two operations.	Medium	JEPU and Contact Centre	Noted – and will be considered further.	Being investigated

## Part 2: Office Hours Customer Contacts

### Contact Centre and Phone System

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
12	Consider cross-training more contact centre advisors so they can deal with a wider range of customer queries.	Medium	Contact Centre	They are all cross trained already. A matrix can be provided to demonstrate this.	Accepted - Complete
13	Replacement of the Council's phone system should be prioritised and the new system should include an automatic switchboard with IVR, to allow people to self-serve in terms of selecting the officers or services that they want to speak to.	Medium	ICT	Replacing the telephony system is now a live project with procurement about to start and an expectation that the system will be implemented by the end of this calendar year (2023). The specification of the new system does include the requirement for IVR (Interactive Voice Response). The precise level of implemented IVR integration will depend on the selected system and the wishes of the cross-service implementation team and governance group.	Accepted - In progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
14	The new phone system should allow callers to be alerted if an officer is not available to take the call and to be given the options to: leave a message, return to the switchboard, or to speak to another officer (with appropriate 'hunt groups' set up).	High (Programmed)	ICT	The capability to divert calls, and retain control – leave a message, and/or recover the call is again expected and requested functionality and within the requirement specification for the new telephony system. The capability for 'Hunt Groups' is also a requirement in the specification and will be much easier to manage than our current systems.	Accepted - In progress
15	Callers to the Contact Centre who are placed on hold should be provided with information about their place in the queue, or anticipated wait time until their call is answered to allow them to make an informed decision as to whether to remain on hold or call back.	High (Programmed)	ICT	The ability to advise customers of their place in a call queue and/or anticipated wait time is within the requirement specification for the new telephony system. Again, the precise implementation details will depend on the selected system and the wishes of the cross-service implementation team and governance group. However, we'd have to calculate the impact of this on the call abandonment KPI.	Being investigated
16	Mystery shopping and customer satisfaction surveys should be routinely undertaken to better understand how staff are performing, if scripts are being followed, and if the service is meeting customer expectations and standards set out in the new customer charter.	Medium	Contact Centre	The new telephony system will have more monitoring functionality. If external mystery shopping or surveys are requested, funding will have to be sought.	Being investigated

Website

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
17	Consider revising the layout of the website, so that navigation menus are available at all times (i.e. through use of a mega-menu), and to optimise displays on all devices, particularly mobile phones.	Medium	Digital Team	<p>The website has undergone layout, styling and menu changes in the past six months to optimise the customer journey. This has in part contributed to a decrease of greater than 20% in customers expressing dissatisfaction with the website when compared with 2019.</p> <p>Building on this, the website will be optimised for wider screens and a “sticky menu” will be introduced to allow the options contained in it to be accessed at all times, negating the need to scroll to the top of the page to find them.</p> <p>The website meets accessibility guidance as well as government good practice standards.</p>	Accepted - In progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
18	Consider how customer journeys via the Council's website can be optimised to shorten the number of interactions.	High	Digital Team	<p>A full analysis of customer journeys was completed as part of a project to review and renew the council's website, part of which involved the Digital Service's team working with almost every team across the council to review the structure of the website, as well as its content. Based on this, usage analytics, and a card sorting exercise, a draft taxonomy was created and a public consultation was held: <a href="https://www.westberks.gov.uk/website-structure-review">https://www.westberks.gov.uk/website-structure-review</a>.</p> <p>Changes to the taxonomy of the website based on the outcome of the consultation were completed in September 2022, This has in part contributed to a decrease of greater than 20% in customers expressing dissatisfaction with the website when compared with 2019.</p> <p>We will be working with many other customer facing services throughout the coming year to ensure their pages are current and the customer journey is as efficient and effective as it can be.</p>	Business as Usual



<b>Ref</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Officer Comment</b>	<b>Status</b>
19	The Council should run workshops to see if the report a problem page can be made easier for customers to use.	Low	Digital Team and Environment	The current report a problem page will be retired in the next couple of months and the replacement will be easier to use. Customer feedback relating to the enquiry types already migrated across to the new system has been very positive.	Not to be progressed at this time

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
20	<p>There should be further integration of third-party applications within the 'My Account' system to help eliminate the need for multiple logins. Ideally, all existing logins should be identified and programmed for inclusion where OpenID login functionality is supported.</p>	Medium	Digital Team	<p>All new public facing platforms should have this integration and we are currently exploring how we might achieve it with our most used existing platforms.</p> <p>For example discussion has taken place between the supplier of My Council Tax on how to integrate that login with My Account, and integration with the planning Public Access portal and Libraries' platform is being explored.</p> <p>Other public facing platforms such as Jobs Go Public and the West Berkshire Directory platforms are due to be replaced within the next 12 months, so there is little cost benefit to delivering an integrated login for these, however this functionality should be built into their replacement.</p> <p>This is being done through the Many Channels, One Service project. Pace of integration as well as accessibility of APIs is influenced by available resource and cost of integration.</p>	Accepted - In progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
21	All new IT systems should be rigorously tested to ensure they are not released with bugs, with sign-off required by service leads.	High	ICT	<p>Rigorous testing is of course a sensible, and necessary key phase of any new system implementation. ICT will always be keen to support this process and to assist services in developing test plans and with testing ourselves. However, no system is ever released without bugs – it's therefore important to ensure that key functions are working; and ICT will always assist in implementing patches, fixes, and updates.</p> <p>Service Leads do not 'sign off' as this requires technical knowledge. Testing is already undertaken and systems are not routinely rolled out without this having taken place.</p>	Accepted (in part) – complete

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
22	Provide organisation charts on the Council's intranet to make it easier for Members to find the appropriate officer to handle their queries.	High	Digital Team	<p>There is already an interactive organisation chart as part of the council's People Finder on its intranet: <a href="https://intranet/peoplefinder">https://intranet/peoplefinder</a>. This is dependent on the data provided by HR, and the Digital Services team is working with these teams to improve it, and therefore the People Finder.</p> <p>In addition there is a new overview of the Senior Management Team and link to the Senior Management Structure here: <a href="https://www.westberks.gov.uk/council-structure">https://www.westberks.gov.uk/council-structure</a></p>	Accepted – complete
23	Provide more Member training on how to use Council systems including ModernGov and discuss with Members how they can be better used.	High (Programmed)	ICT and Democratic Services	Members will receive training on how to use ModernGov as part of the induction programme following the May 2023 elections. Members will be asked to use this to access meeting agendas and minutes instead of email.	Accepted – complete

Provision for Disabled Customers

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
24	The need for BSL interpretation of Council meetings should be reviewed once further government guidance has been issued in 2023.	Medium	Democratic Services and BCT Team	<p>In anticipation of new Legislation there was a WBC officer meeting in April 2022 to consider potential implications.</p> <p>Published Guidance will need to be fully considered alongside an assessment of local need, best practice and the appropriateness of using BSL in certain circumstances.</p> <p>Recommendations on ways of working to support access would then need to be made and fully considered corporately to ensure compliance.</p>	Accepted – in progress
25	Produce BSL videos about Council services and easy read versions of key documents to make them accessible to as wide a range of customers as possible.	Medium	Adult Social Care and All Services	<p>ASC comment: There is not sufficient capacity within the Sensory Needs team to generate these resources on behalf of the wider council. They can be commercially sourced.</p>	Not to be progressed at this time

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
26	Consider what further changes need to be made for engaging and supporting disabled customers once the current Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work stream has been completed.	Medium	BCT Team	<p>An EDI Framework has been developed informed by extensive engagement opportunities to capture the lived experience of our communities. To ensure that the Framework was evidence based every effort was made to capture all voices to inform its development.</p> <p>The Framework will progress through the Executive Cycle to Executive during 2023. During this timeframe work be undertaken to share the EDI Framework as widely as possible with key stakeholders, both external and internal, so that all services have opportunity to consider how the Framework should shape ways of working and decision making.</p> <p>Dedicated resources to support the implementation of the Framework are extremely limited with a vacancy for one of the lead officer posts – this will hamper work such as the delivery of training, providing officer support and peer mentoring to embed the Framework.</p> <p>The current EDI work stream will ensure that the above actions are undertaken however work to fully embed the EDI Framework across the Council will be an enduring responsibility for all services.</p>	Accepted – in progress

Customer Service Standards and Training

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
27	Review the remit of the Customer First Programme Board or its successor. Members felt this should be more strategic and high profile, and should drive customer service improvements across the Council, including digital transformation. This should have stronger reporting mechanisms than at present. Also, opportunities should be taken to make better use of relevant Members' expertise (e.g. through membership of Customer First Programme Board or its successor).	High	Executive Directors	A governance review is underway. Terms of Reference for new boards are currently being considered. In terms of member involvement, one of the clear recommendations of the CfGS review of our existing arrangements suggested that member involvement in operational matters can be too high. To use member expertise in the way suggested could fall into this territory and it is important to maintain delineation between strategic member advice and operational matters delegated to officers.	Accepted (in Part) – in progress
28	The new Customer Service Charter clearly sets out the standards that the Council will deliver. This should be clearly displayed on the website and in Council offices so customers know the standards that they can expect to receive. Training should be provided to ensure that all staff are aware of the Charter and how to best meet the needs of the customer. Performance against targets should be measured on an ongoing basis and reported corporately.	High	Customer Engagement and Transformation and HR	This is being factored into service planning and KPIs for 2023/24.	Accepted – in progress

Adult Social Care

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
29	Develop a comprehensive communications campaign to recruit and train more independent advocates in order to address the current shortfall and reduce delays for customers.	Medium	Adult Social Care and Comms Team	This work has not yet progressed significantly because there is a tender process underway to identify a new provider of advocacy services. This has been slightly delayed. The action will be progressed with the new incumbent once appointed.	Accepted – in progress
30	Investigate the business case for developing a High Street presence in central and eastern areas of the district to support ASC and other services.	Low	Adult Social Care	There are discussions underway relating to both the future provision in Central and relating to the Turnhams Green site. This will need to align with future plans both for corporate offices and for relevant Town plans. Health colleagues have also expressed some interest in an integrated/ co-located delivery model. The wider option of a high-street presence is being fed into those discussions but all of this is expected to take time.	Under investigation



Development and Regulation

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Officer Comment</b>	<b>Status</b>
31	Review how the Planning Service can work with the Environment Delivery Team to offer a more integrated service for customers who are looking to improve the environmental performance of their development (e.g. through solar panels, heat pumps, or insulation).	High	Development and Regulation / Environment	We will take this forward with the Environment Delivery Team as part of our Service Improvement Plan, noting that Biodiversity Net Gain becomes a specific requirement under the Environment Act in November 2023.	Accepted – in progress
32	Consider what additional guidance could be given to support applicants making simple applications.	Medium	Development and Regulation	We will take this forward as part of our Service Improvement Plan, focussing on the customer journey.  The council recently received funding from DLUHC to implement PlanX, to provide a single point of access for planning enquiries to a council's website, allowing applicants to self-triage their project, checking whether their simple applications requires planning permission, and if so, identifying issues in advance of making an application. Implementation is forecast from December 2023.	Accepted – in progress

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Officer Comment</b>	<b>Status</b>
33	Investigate the use of apps to facilitate developers to engage with local communities, and consider how these could be integrated with the Council's website to provide updates on major developments in the area.	Low	Development and Regulation and Digital Team	<p>We will take this forward as part of our Service Improvement Plan, focussing on how digital planning can improve the customer journey.</p> <p>This has already been done as part of the local plan. There is a need to be clear on the value that any approach would add vs our existing channels.</p>	Under Investigation

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
34	Improve the Council's website to make it easier for customers to undertake routine tasks, such as purchasing maps or paying for planning applications.	Medium	Development and Regulation / Digital Team	<p>We will take this forward as part of our Service Improvement Plan, noting that 96% of planning applications go through the planning portal where there is already an online payment facility. The planning portal also has the facility for creating a location plan and purchasing a site plan online.</p> <p>A full analysis of customer journeys was completed as part of a project to review and renew the council's website, part of which involved the Digital Service's team working with almost every team across the council to review the structure of the website, as well as its content.</p> <p>Included in this was paying for planning applications, which now has a dedicated website page:  <a href="http://www.westberks.gov.uk/planningfees">www.westberks.gov.uk/planningfees</a>.  This provides an alternative method to submit and pay for planning applications.</p> <p>Our user feedback doesn't suggest a high number of issues.</p>	Complete

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
35	Provide additional information about 'important dates' on the Planning Portal (e.g. closing date for objections and the cut-off date for Member call-in).	Medium	Development and Regulation	We will take this forward as part of our Service Improvement Plan, noting that information on cut-off dates for Member call-in is published on the website alongside the weekly list.	Accepted – in progress
36	Amend the format of orange site notices to make them easier to read and to incorporate QR codes that link to the relevant application within the Planning Portal. (This would be a quick win.)	Medium	Development and Regulation	This is in progress as part of our Service Improvement Plan, focussing on the customer journey. There is a dependency on an IT system upgrade - the link doesn't work at present, but it will work when IDOX DMS is in place, anticipated from December 2023.	Accepted – in progress
37	Regularly promote the service where residents can register to be notified of planning applications in their area, and consider using e-newsletter to tell people about planning issues and planning applications.	Medium	Development and Regulation/ Digital Team/ Comms Team	We will take this forward as part of our Service Improvement Plan focussing on the customer journey, including working with the Digital Team to look at how we can use the My Account facility for notifications.	Under investigation

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Officer Comment</b>	<b>Status</b>
38	Consider the use of Planning Advisory Groups as a mechanism for engaging parish / town councils, local residents and other stakeholders on major developments.	Medium	Development and Regulation	We are reviewing stakeholder engagement as part of our Service Improvement Plan including how we can make best use of the Parish District Conference, member workshops, the Development Industry Forum and digital planning. Noting that 86% of T&PCs are already signed up to online consultee access.	Under investigation

Environment

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
39	All elected Members should be encouraged to regularly promote the 'report a problem' tool through local newsletters and magazines.	High	Members and Comms Team	Members to be emailed and encouraged to use the new facility.	Accepted – in progress
40	Consider revising the 'report a problem' page to incorporate icons and help buttons to reduce the number of clicks and to better guide customers through the reporting process.	High	Environment and Digital Team	<p>The current report a problem page will be retired in the next couple of months and the replacement will be easier to use. Customer feedback relating to the enquiry types already migrated across to the new system has been very positive.</p> <p>The new page will have a more intuitive interface. More visual guidance has been produced as part of this, for example on the Report a Pothole page:  <a href="https://www.westberks.gov.uk/reportapothole">https://www.westberks.gov.uk/reportapothole</a></p>	Accepted – in progress

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
41	Consider how communications can be improved including: providing proactive network management information (e.g. through the website, monthly newsletter, social media, etc); website content; mystery shopping; seeking customer feedback; achieving a more consistent approach to customer service across the department; and managing longer duration enquiries.	Medium	Environment and Comms Team	Work is ongoing with the Comms Team. A comprehensive Comms and Engagement Strategy has been implemented and feedback suggests good levels of performance and satisfaction with the Comms Team is high. See report to OSMC in Jan 2022. However, there is always room for improvement the team is happy to make any necessary enhancements.	Accepted - complete

Ref	Proposal	Priority	Lead	Officer Comment	Status
42	Consider how engagement with local environmental groups can be improved, including via the Parish Climate Forum.	Medium	Environment	<p>The Council has made use of the <a href="#">aDoddle platform</a> to provide an area where local environmental groups can have a presence and connect with each other and the general public for information and event sharing, volunteering opportunities etc. Regular engagement also happens with a number of groups through the West Berkshire Natural Solutions Delivery Partnership (for example: North Wessex Downs AONB, BBOWT, ARK).</p> <p>The West Berkshire Parish Climate Forum has specifically been for Parish and Town Councils to meet together with WBC so that it can remain focused on areas most relevant to their functions but there is always the option for a local environmental group to come and present at one of these meetings or lead a relevant discussion.</p> <p>With the formation of the new Climate Change Service within the Environment Department there are likely to be discussions around other ways in which we can engage with local environmental groups and how we better promote awareness and use of the aDoddle mapping platform.</p> <p>The promotion of the Environment Newsletter happens on a regular basis.</p>	Accepted - completed



# Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges

<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Iain Cottingham
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	7 June 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Gordon Oliver
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4379

## 1 Purpose of the Report

To provide a response to the recommendations made in the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) Task and Finish Group on Fees and Charges, which was presented to Members of the OSMC in March 2023.

## 2 Recommendation

For the Executive to agree the proposed action plan that has been developed in response to the recommendations raised by the Task and Finish Group.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have financial implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Human Resource:</b>	There are no HR implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have HR implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.

**Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges**

<b>Legal:</b>	There are no Legal implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Legal implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	The recommended actions do not introduce any significant new risks for the Council at this stage. Some actions may affect risks to the Council if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Property:</b>	There are no Property implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Property implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
<b>Policy:</b>	There are no Policy implications arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have Property implications if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		There are no inequality impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have implications for inequalities if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		There are no impacts for people with protected characteristics arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have implications for inequalities if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.

**Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges**

<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		There are no environmental impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have environmental impacts if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		There are no health impacts arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Some actions may have environmental impacts if implemented and these would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		None.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		There are no impacts on Digital Services arising directly from the recommended actions at this stage. Any impacts associated with individual actions would be considered as part of any future decision making processes.
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	X			The proposals outlined in this report support the following outcome under the 'Building Public Services for the Future' priority in the draft Council Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong budget management (compared to all local authorities in England) and initiatives to generate financial efficiency</li> </ul>
<b>Core Business:</b>	X			If implemented, the recommendations related to Leisure Services would improve the leisure offer in West Berkshire and would ensure that discounts are appropriately targeted. This would support the Council's priority to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		None

<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Relevant officers have been consulted, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources)</li><li>• Eric Owens (Service Director – Development and Regulation)</li><li>• April Peberdy (Interim Service Director – Communities and Wellbeing)</li><li>• Michelle Sancho (Acting Head of Education Services)</li><li>• Jon Winstanley (Service Director – Environment)</li></ul>
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## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group was created in January 2022 to consider further options in relation to charging for West Berkshire Council's services.
- 4.2 The OSMC received the final report in March 2023 and requested that this be referred to the Executive for consideration. An action plan has been developed against each of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, which sets out the proposed responses to the Task Group's recommendations.
- 4.3 It should be noted that some of the report's recommendations have already been implemented, or are being addressed through other mechanisms, such as contract retendering.
- 4.4 For some of the Task Group recommendations, further work is required in order to test the business case, or else it is recommended that proposals should not be implemented due to the lack of a clear business case.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 At its meeting on 25 January 2022, OSMC agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider further options in relation to charging for West Berkshire Council's services. The following were highlighted as the key areas of focus for the Task and Finish Group and its subsequent recommendations:
  - New proposals for Planning income;
  - The Leisure Strategy and fees and income potentially arising from this;
  - Other opportunities for commercial charging for services, particularly those provided by the following departments:
    - Development and Regulation
    - Communities and Wellbeing
    - Environment

## **Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges**

- 5.2 In addition to exploring further opportunities for charging for Council services, the Task Group was also asked to consider the value for money of the fees and charges levied and the appropriate balance between affordability and income generation.
- 5.3 A copy of the Task and Finish Group's terms of reference is provided in Appendix A.
- 5.4 The Task and Finish Group met five times between September 2022 and January 2023 to collect evidence for the review. An interim report was presented to the OSMC meeting on 29 November 2022, which set out the Task and Finish Group's preliminary findings, with the final report presented to the OSMC on 7 March 2023.
- 5.5 The report set out a series of 10 recommendations across the following areas:
- Budget Report – Presentation of Information
  - Leisure Fees and Charges
  - Environment Fees and Charges
  - People Directorate Fees and Charges

### **Proposals**

- 5.6 Following a review of the recommendations, a proposed action plan has been prepared to respond to the points raised. This is set out in Appendix B of this report.

## **6 Other options considered**

- 6.1 The Executive could choose not to approve some or all of the proposed actions, however, it is important to respond to Member concerns about fees and charges where action has not already been taken in respect of the issues raised.

## **7 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The proposed Action Plan responds to the Task and Finish Group's recommendations, taking account of any actions that have already been implemented.

## **8 Appendices**

Appendix A - Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Proposed actions in response to the Task and Finish Group recommendations

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### **Background Papers:**

Fees and Charges Task Group – Interim Report, OSMC, 29 November 2022

Fees and Charges Task Group – Final Report, OSMC, 7 March 2023

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**Subject to Call-In:**

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** All wards

**Officer details:**

Name: Gordon Oliver  
Job Title: Principal Policy Officer (Democratic Services and Scrutiny)  
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## Overview and Scrutiny Review Matrix

**Review Topic: Fees and Charges**

**Timescale**

**Start: Aug 2022**

**Finish: Nov 2022**

### Review Rationale:

At its meeting on 25 January 2022, OSMC agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider further options in relation to charging for West Berkshire Council's services

The OSMC report highlighted the following as the recommended areas of focus for the Task and Finish Group:

- a. New proposals on planning income
- b. Leisure strategy and fees and income potentially arising from this
- c. Other opportunities for commercial charging in the Place Directorate

Some considerations of this review may be:

- a. What are the current fees and charges, how have they been determined, and do they deliver good value?
- b. What are the statutory constraints that affect the setting of individual fees and charges, and what scope is there to vary fees and charges from existing levels?
- c. How do West Berkshire's fees and charges and associated revenues compare to other equivalent local authorities?
- d. Are there any services that West Berkshire Council does not charge for, or does not currently provide?
- e. How do the levels of fees and charges affect demand for discretionary services and what are the likely impacts in terms of achievement of Council Strategy priorities?
- f. What do residents / services users think about current fees and charges in terms of their affordability and value for money?
- g. What is the appropriate balance between affordability and revenue generation?
- h. Are differentiated fees and charges appropriate for particular service user groups in order to address issues of access, affordability and equity?
- i. How have historic increases in fees and charges taken account of inflation, and which measure of inflation is most appropriate when determining increases?

**Terms of Reference:**

The Task and Finish Group will:

- **Part 1:** Proposals on Planning Income

*Consider opportunities for new fees and charges associated with all aspects of the Planning Service including, but not limited to: planning enquiries; pre-planning advice; planning applications; discharge of conditions; and S106 agreement legal fees. Also consider the value associated with existing fees.*

- **Part 2:** Leisure Strategy Fees and Charges

*Review the existing fees and charges associated with services provided through the West Berkshire Leisure Contract with a priority of delivering value. Consider the potential to charge for additional services required to deliver the new Leisure Strategy and also consider the value associated with existing fees*

- **Part 3:** Other opportunities for commercial charging

*Investigate potential additional opportunities to charge for services provided by the Place and People Directorates:*

- *Development & Regulation*
- *Communities & Wellbeing*
- *Environment*

*Also, consider whether there are opportunities to charge for services provided in the Resources Directorate*

Members will collate their findings which will then form the basis of a report to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.

**Review Membership:**

Councillor Tony Linden  
Councillor Jeff Brooks  
Councillor Steve Masters  
Councillor Biyi Oloko

**Chairman:** Councillor Tony Linden

**Vice-Chairman:** N/A

**Scrutiny Officer:** Gordon Oliver

**Information Required:**

Current WBC fees and charges  
Current fees and charges of comparator authorities / competitors  
Historic fees and charges  
Trends in demand / service usage  
Residents survey data  
Inflation calculation methodology  
Current rationale / strategy for fee changes



**Documents/Evidence:**

Residents Survey outcome report (2020 and 2021)  
Quarterly reporting for relevant service areas

**Witnesses:** *(Who/Why?)*

Executive Director - Resources  
Finance Manager  
Service Director – Development & Regulation  
Team Leader Development Control

Service Director – Communities & Wellbeing  
Interim Consultant (Leisure)  
Sports & Leisure Manager

Service Director – Environment  
Waste Manager  
Environment Delivery Manager  
Countryside Manager  
Asset Manager  
Network Manager  
Transport Services Manager

Other Service Directors and Officers as the Task Group considers appropriate

**Measures Available**

Suite of data sets as outlined above

**Desired Outcomes:**

A report with a clear set of recommendations on potential changes to fees and charges and a clear strategy for managing future increases.

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### Budget Report – Presentation of Information

Ref	Proposal	Lead	Response
1	To consider amending the fees and charges appendices of the Revenue Budget Reports in future years to provide Members with additional information to support decision making:	Finance & Property	The 2023-24 budget reports on fees and charges were partially amended to include some of the proposed changes below. Further changes will be made for the 2024-25 budget reports on fees and charges to incorporate proposals (a) to (g) below.
(a)	Provide details of the level of income for each fee / charge in the preceding year and (if possible) the number of 'units sold' – where this is not possible (e.g. due to a lack of granularity in the cost centres used), revenues for groups of fees and charges should be provided.	Finance & Property	See above
(b)	There should be a clear and consistent key used throughout the document to identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which fees / charges are statutory with levels determined by legislation;</li> <li>• which fees / charges are statutory with local discretion as to the levels;</li> <li>• which fees / charges are discretionary and in the Council's control.</li> </ul>	Finance & Property	See above
(c)	There should be a short accompanying narrative to explain the rationale for any increments, decrements in fees / charges, or for keeping them unchanged – if	Finance & Property	See above

	there are variations within a group of fees / charges, the reasons for the variations should be made clear.		
(d)	The percentage increase / decrease should be provided alongside the existing and proposed fees in all cases.	Finance & Property	See above
(e)	The reason for including a particular measure of inflation should be made clear, and if there is evidence of changes in costs that are unique to a particular service that are significantly different to the general inflationary figure, then consideration should be given to tailoring proposed increases / decreases accordingly.	Finance & Property	See above
(f)	All Council departments should be required to undertake benchmarking of fees and charges on a regular basis and the report should indicated when the latest benchmarking exercised has been completed in relation to each set of fees and charges.	Finance & Property	See above
(g)	The report should provide an estimation as to the likely impact of the changes in fees and charges on the level of future income.	Finance & Property	See above

### Leisure Fees and Charges

Ref	Proposal	Lead	
2	Ask Leisure Service to undertake regular 'mystery shopper' exercises to ensure that online information	Leisure	A mystery shopping exercise can be regularly implemented once the new leisure contract commences in July 23. This will ensure that online

	about fees and charges provided by the new Leisure Services Contractor is up-to-date and accurate.		information is regularly reviewed and is accurate. This can be done with existing staff resources.
3	Review the West Berkshire Card concession scheme to ensure that discounts are appropriate and effectively targeted (e.g. raising the threshold for age-related discounts in line with the increase in state pension entitlement age).	Leisure	The pricing/discount structure of the West Berkshire Card concession scheme will be discussed with the new leisure contract provider once the new contract commences in July 2023.
4	Investigate the business case for investing in local leisure centres in order to make facilities more attractive and competitive with those in the private sector and neighbouring local authorities. This would allow for fees to be increased and would drive additional use and income.	Leisure	The development of the Newbury Lido at Northcroft Leisure Centre is underway and due for completion in the summer of 2023. Plans are in place for further investment at Northcroft Leisure Centre later in the year. Developments are likely to increase centre usage and this has been factored as part of the new Leisure contract pricing model. Any increase in pricing would need to be discussed with the new leisure provider and considered in relation to market forces and ensure that pricing does not become a barrier for resident usage.
5	Investigate the business case for constructing a new swimming pool to serve residents in the east of the district.	Leisure	Sport England Facilities Planning model has been used to determine demand for leisure facilities across the district. Current modelling has not indicated a requirement for additional pool facilities at this time.

## Environment

Ref	Proposal	Lead	Response
6	Investigate the business case for additional advertising contracts at Newbury Bus Station and at Henwick playing pitches.	Transport and Countryside	<p>Will hold discussions with private sector providers regarding the potential for selling additional advertising at these locations.</p> <p>Discussions will also be held with the Henwick Worthy Joint Management Committee and bus operators to ensure that proposals are workable and do not adversely affect the operation of the playing pitches and bus station. Planning will also be consulted on any proposals.</p> <p>Subject to the outcome of the above discussions, a competitive procurement process may be required to provide and sell the additional advertising space.</p> <p>Any advertising would need to be appropriate to the setting and audience (i.e. no junk food advertising at Henwick, and promotion of local businesses as far as possible).</p>
7	Seek legal advice regarding mechanisms to require that all estate roads be adopted in order to ensure they are built to an appropriate standard, while securing the appropriate inspection and supervision fees	Transport and Countryside	Discussion underway with Legal colleagues to assess whether developers can be prevented from opting not to have their roads adopted.

## People Directorate

8	<p>Thoroughly look at the area of Schools Trading to understand the current proportion of academies buying services from West Berkshire Council, and consider how the Council could gain a greater proportion of academy school spending on all services, as well as maximising opportunities within maintained schools. This should be presented as a future report to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.</p>	Education	<p>The Market Management Lead has reviewed the current market and range of services. Finance have confirmed that we currently sell 1,448 products to schools. Currently all academies buy services from West Berkshire Council (Education Services) as do the maintained schools. Our view is that the market is quite saturated within West Berkshire Schools.</p> <p>Assessing the full market potential i.e. which products could we sell that we are not selling, is a significant piece of work which can be undertaken by the Market Management Lead but will require a further number of weeks.</p>
9	<p>Consider the business case for bundling packages of traded services to schools, whereby schools taking all / multiple services are offered discounts, and for charging on a per-pupil basis rather than a flat rate where appropriate.</p>	Education	<p>This has been considered by the Head of Service together with John Carpenter (Market Management Lead). The traded work is mostly the selling of professional's time – subject matter experts. These are built at around cost plus 10%. If bundled we would risk running at a loss. If the price increased we would risk losing custom. On this basis the initial assessment of the case for bundling looks weak.</p> <p>We have explored charging on a per-pupil basis. We are concerned that changing the pricing structure would not be beneficial for the majority of services that involve the purchase of professional time. We could explore if there are any services where this may be appropriate.</p>

**Cross-Directorate Fees and Charges**

Ref	Proposal	Lead	Response
10	All Council departments should undertake regular reviews to identify additional opportunities to charge for services. Findings should be reported to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.	Finance & Property	The accountancy team have comparative information for many of our services and this can be shared at a high level to identify potential charges; implementation of these will depend on local circumstances e.g. car parking income varies depending on where a Council is located



# Amendments to Public Protection Partnership’s Inter Authority Agreement (IAA)

<b>Committee Considering Report</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 September 2023
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Lee Dillon
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	07 September 2023
<b>Report Author:</b>	Sean Murphy
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX4415

## 1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To request that the Executive delegates authority to the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, to amend the IAA to reflect the changes to the constitution in respect of the Joint Public Protection Committee approved by Council on 20 July 2023.

## 2 Recommendation

That Executive:

2.1 **APPROVES** that the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, be authorised to make the amendments to the Inter-Authority Agreement of the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2017 to reflect the decisions of this Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>There are no financial implications associated with the compilation of this report or the changes to the agreement.</p> <p>There may be additional costs to the partner authorities associated with the additional member attending meetings.</p>

Amendments to Public Protection Partnership's Inter Authority Agreement (IAA)

<b>Human Resource:</b>	There are no HR implications associated with this report.			
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>The arrangements of the JPPC and the Public Protection Partnership are set out in the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA).</p> <p>The decision making powers of the Committee straddle both Executive and Council Functions. However, any amendments to the IAA are reserved to the Executive. It is therefore a requirement that a report is brought to the Executive to authorise the requisite amendments to the IAA to reflect the constitutional change to the membership of the Committee agreed at the meeting of Full Council on the 20th July 2023.</p> <p>Nicola Thomas has been consulted on the report and will be authorised to make the changes to the IAA should Members be minded to agree this report.</p>			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	There is a risk that any decision of the JPPC could be challenged. Having clear rules governing the way meetings will be conducted, should reduce the risk of challenges being successful.			
<b>Property:</b>	There are no property implications associated with this report.			
<b>Policy:</b>	The Inter Authority Agreement is being amended to reflect the decision that was made at the 20 July 2023 Council meeting to amend Part 6.5 (Appendix Joint Public Protection Committee) and Part 3.1 (JPPC) of the Constitution to reflect the revised membership of the Joint Public Protection Committee.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		

## Amendments to Public Protection Partnership's Inter Authority Agreement (IAA)

<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Health Impact:</b>		x		
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		x		
<b>Core Business:</b>		x		
<b>Data Impact:</b>		x		
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>The Joint Public Protection Committee was consulted at the meeting on the 12 June 2023.</p> <p>The Governance and Ethics Committee was consulted at the Special meeting which took place on the 26 June 2023. A decision was taken at the 20 July 2023 Council meeting to amend the membership of the JPPC.</p> <p>Bracknell Forest Council's Executive was consulted at the 19 September 2023 meeting about the changes to the IAA and a decision was taken at their 13 September 2023 Full Council meeting about the additional appointment.</p>			

## 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Following a discussion on the Terms of Reference at the 12 July 2023 Joint Public Protection Committee Members proposed that the membership of the Committee be extended. The proposal was to increase the membership by one additional Council Member from each partner Council reflecting the political composition of the individual

council. This would extend the total number of members on the Committee from four to six Members.

- 4.2 To enact the constitutional elements of the decision a report was taken to the meeting of Full Council on the 20th July 2023. The Council resolved to amend Parts 3.1 and 6.5 of the Constitution to increase the membership of the JPPC from two to three members from each authority consisting of the Executive Member in whose portfolio Public Protection falls and two Members of the Council.
- 4.3 Amendments to the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) are reserved to the Executive therefore this matter is before the Executive to seek authorisation for the requisite amendments to the IAA to reflect the change to the membership of the Committee agreed by Council and our partners in Bracknell Forest.
- 4.4 Part 3 of Schedule 1 of the Inter-Authority Agreement of the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2017 ('the Agreement') sets out the Membership of the Joint Public Protection Committee. It is proposed that the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, be authorised to make the requisite amendments to 'the Agreement' to reflect the decisions of this Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

## 5 Other options considered

- 5.1 Based on the decisions made at full Council in West Berkshire in July 2023, the Bracknell Forest Council Executive and Full Council in September 2023 and the requirements around amending the IAA no further options are proposed.

## 6 Conclusion

- 6.1 It was agreed at the Council meeting that the appointment will be effective from the date that the amendments to the Inter Authority Agreement is completed by both authorities.

## 7 Appendices

- 7.1 None

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### Background Papers:

West Berkshire Council's Constitution

The Minutes of the 12 June 2023 Joint Public Protection Committee.

The report and minutes considered at the Special Governance and Ethics Committee on the 26 June 2023.

The report and minutes to the 20 July Council 2023 meeting

The report and minutes of the 13 September 2023 Bracknell Forest Council Full Council meeting.

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The report and minutes of the 19 September 2023 Bracknell Forest Council Executive meeting.

**Subject to Call-In:** Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** All

**Officer details:**

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## Item 14:

### **Member Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 September 2023.**

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by Councillors in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

**A. Question submitted by Councillor Vicky Poole to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:**

*"I would greatly value an update on the Burghfield Skatepark redevelopment. Burghfield Parish has been awarded 100k CIL money for the project and from speaking with the residents who are most interested in the project. Can you as the portfolio holder advise of a timeline for the procurement and redevelopment of the skatepark please?"*

**B. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel:**

*"The roads and pavements in the Three Firs Way area of Burghfield Common are in a state of disrepair, with widespread degradation of surfaces and unkempt weeds along many kerbs. After raising the issue with officers before the election, I was told that individually there are no potholes deep enough to tick the box for repair – which may be true, but the cumulative effect across the development makes residents feel neglected by the council. Before I could follow up, the voters inexplicably decided that I should no longer be part of the Executive – so will the portfolio holder agree to meet with me on site so I can show her the situation, and push for officers to prioritise remedial works?"*

**C. Question submitted by Councillor Jo Stewart to the Leader of the Council:**

*"On World Suicide Prevention Awareness Day – Sunday 10th September – there appeared to be nothing on the council's website or on social media pages regarding this important awareness day. Wouldn't it have been an ideal opportunity to share with residents vital and practical information about how to speak to friends and loved ones who may be having suicidal thoughts?"*

**D. Question submitted by Councillor Richard Somner to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Community Engagement:**

*"In your 100-day plan, the Liberal Democrat administration said you would re-introduce neighbour notification letters for planning applications. It has now been 139 days. Have you done so and accepted the increased cost to the council?"*

**E. Question submitted by Councillor Howard Woollaston to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel:**

*"Will the portfolio holder honour the commitment she gave to me at the Council Meeting on 20 July, and consult local residents and businesses before implementing any scheme to extend pedestrianisation in Newbury town centre?"*

**F. Question submitted by Councillor Dominic Boeck to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services:**

*"Under the Children Act 2004, local authorities have a duty to promote cooperation between 'relevant partners', including the police, the NHS and education providers, while those partners have a duty to cooperate with the local*

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*authority in turn. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve. We use the Corporate Parenting Panel to hear the voices of children and young people in our care and to explore, with our partners, how we are doing the best for them. Will the Lead Member for Children and Young People, explain how postponing the Corporate Parenting Panel scheduled for 19 September at short notice, for reasons of "member availability", puts our children and young people first?"*

**G. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services:**

*"In their period of opposition during the last Conservative administration, the Liberal Democrats proposed budget amendments in 2020, 2021 and 2022 which cumulatively, if they had been accepted, would have reduced council reserves by a total of £5.5million by 2023. Given the challenging financial environment being faced by councils all over the country because of high inflation and demand, does the new administration agree that the then Conservative-controlled Council was correct to reject these Liberal Democrat amendments?"*

**H. Question submitted by Councillor Richard Somner to the Portfolio Holder for Governance and Transformation:**

*"In your 100-day plan, the Liberal Democrat administration said you would cancel Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) demands made to homeowners who made a mistake in their planning application process. It has now been 139 days. Have you done so or were you simply overpromising to win an election?"*

**I. Question submitted by Councillor Howard Woollaston to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:**

*"In your 100-day plan, the Liberal Democrat administration said you would cancel the plans to deliver the clubhouse and stands at the Monks Lane Sports Hub. It has now been 139 days. Have you done so?"*

**J. Question submitted by Councillor Dominic Boeck to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel:**

*"Aldermaston Wharf is a community represented by three Parish Councils, all of which have raised concerns about inconsiderate parking there. A particular problem is caused by users of the Kennet and Avon canal parking in Mallard Way and Heron Way. Will the Lead Member for Highways meet me on site so I can show her the extent of the problem and explain the impact on residents?"*

**K. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity:**

*"If the administration decides to move to 3 or even 4 weekly black bin collections, how much money will be saved from the revenue budget?"*



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**L. Question submitted by Councillor Howard Woollaston to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:**

*"In your 100-day plan, the Liberal Democrat administration said you would immediately return the grass pitch at Faraday Road to bookable football space. Has the pitch been opened within your 100-day target?"*

**M. Question submitted by Councillor Dominic Boeck to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel:**

*"I have had many questions from residents and Parish Councils about the redevelopment of the Four Houses Corner site for the benefit of WBC's tenants. The Executive of the previous Conservative administration accepted fully our duty of care to provide safe and appropriate accommodation for our tenants. We made it clear to officers, though, that we expected the redevelopment to be carried out at costs the Council could afford. How should I reply when I am asked how Council is managing the cost of the Four Houses Corner redevelopment?"*

**N. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity:**

*"If the administration decides to move to 3 or even 4 weekly black bin collections, what help will be available to families like mine who despite recycling all the waste that they can, still have a full black bin every 2 weeks?"*

**O. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services:**

*"Despite usable reserves being £3.5m higher in the 2023-24 Budget at the end of the previous Conservative administration's term than at its start in the 2019-20 Budget, the Liberal Democrats have announced that they cannot implement many of their election promises due to budgetary pressures. When will the administration present the emergency budget explicitly promised by Cllr Abbs at the budget meeting in March 2023?"*

**P. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services:**

*"A Burghfield Common resident in my ward lives in a house which backs onto the playing field of the Willink School. In 2021, storms caused damage to the school's wire fence separating the playing field from the back alley of their and their neighbours' properties. The mangled remains of the fence still protrude as an eyesore from their back garden, and the resultant gap in the fence and easy access to the playing field attracts antisocial behaviour. I reported the issue to Education officers last summer, but to date the school have been unwilling to remove the fence and repair the gap. Will the portfolio holder please urge officers and the school to remedy what is now a long-running nuisance to my resident?"*

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