

REPORT FROM DISTRICT COUNCILLOR TONY LINDEN

Council Meetings

Executive

Budget

At the meeting of the Executive on 13 February, we considered a number of financial papers, including the draft Revenue Budget (more below), the Investment and Borrowing Strategy, the Medium Term Financial Strategy, and the Capital Strategy, all of which will be considered by Council on 3 March (and, as is the convention, were passed for that discussion without any comment other than technical questions). We also received a Q3 Capital Financial Performance Report, a Q3 Revenue Financial Performance Report and a mid-year Treasury Management Report.

The draft WBC revenue budget includes a council tax increase of 1.99% and a 2% rise in the Adult Social Care (ASC) precept (together raising around £4m in additional revenue), enabling the council to deliver the necessary spending with no cuts to services.

On the capital side, key investments include;

- Over £7.5m for new schools and expansion to existing schools (including Highwood Copse, Theale Primary and The Willink);
- £1.2m in large scale tree planting;
- Over £10m in improving roads and junctions around the district.

Council Strategy

The Council Strategy Delivery Plan was also adopted which sets out the key performance measures that the Executive will monitor against the priorities outlined in our Council Strategy 2019 – 2023. You will see from the appendices in the financial papers how these priorities will be financially supported either through our capital programme or revenue budget.

Playing Pitch Strategy

West Berkshire Council has been working with Sport England and local sporting bodies to develop a document to guide the investment, development and improvement of playing pitches over the next ten years. The West Berkshire Playing Pitch Strategy covers hockey, cricket and rugby as well as football.

We recognise that the local youth, ladies and adult teams require some facility improvements as they progress in their leagues. We also are aware that there is a need for more artificial playing surfaces, and better access to some pitches, particularly at schools. This strategy will help us support local high profile clubs with the most appropriate facilities.

All of the papers are available at

<http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=117&MIId=5123&Ver=4>

Anti-Social Behaviour – Newbury town centre

West Berkshire Council is looking to introduce a new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Newbury town centre. PSPOs allow the council to place restrictions on certain behaviour in an area, to make sure that everyone can feel safer and enjoy public spaces.

People who live, visit or work in Newbury town centre are being asked to take part in a consultation on the order to help reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour in the town centre.

The proposal is to put restrictions on street drinking and anti-social behaviour. Failing to comply with the PSPO is a criminal offence which could result in a Fixed Penalty Notice of up to £100 or a fine of up to £1,000 if prosecuted.

The consultation will be live between 24 February and 6 April 2020. The initial findings from the consultation will be taken to the Building Communities Together Partnership on 21 April 2020, for a recommendation on the final decision. It is expected that the final decision will be made by 14 July 2020. Follow the link to take part in the consultation

www.westberks.gov.uk/psponewbury

Peer Challenge Review Published

West Berkshire Council has received the results of a peer review held at the end of last year.

The voluntary review was requested by the council as part of its ongoing commitment to delivering high quality, efficient and effective services for residents. It was conducted by the Local Government Association over four days in November 2019 and involved eight officers and councillors from across the country.

The highlights are:

- Partners value the council for good quality delivery across a range of council services and its track record in securing external funding for the district
- Sound financial management with a good track record of delivering savings and increasing income, a £131m capital programme, £100m investment fund and a £1m Transformation fund to help deliver change in the organisation
- That there is much to celebrate but that the council is too modest - more should be done to shout about what is delivered to enable people to enjoy what has been achieved
- West Berkshire, has very good transport links with the rest of the country and has a strong and diverse local economy. Partners are keen for the council to help build on its 'place leadership' role by further raising the ambition, establishing clarity of purpose and sharpening the focus setting of a clear direction for West Berkshire into the future and influence the place it should be
- A changed Executive and managerial leadership team are having a positive impact
- There should be an additional focus on hearing the voice of residents increasingly consistently, more directly and on a wider range of issues
- Embed the new Council Strategy in all aspects of the council's business

The full report can be read via the link

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=48512&p=0>

Veolia Respect Campaign

The Council has been raising the profile of our Veolia waste teams in #ExpectRespect campaign through social media. It recognises that waste collection teams work in all-weather conditions and should be valued by our residents and treated with respect by highlighting some of the risks associated with their work.

District Parish Conference

A reminder that the next conference is on 12 March at 17:30 (refreshments, etc) for 18:30 with a main theme of the environment- there will be a host of stands with an environmental theme.

Environment Strategy Consultation now closed

The consultation on the draft is now closed and we will be reviewing the feedback to inform the Environment Strategy going forward for adoption at the Executive meeting on 30 April.

We have received considered feedback from our communities and this will be shared in further detail in due course. The next step and arguably the more significant will be the formulation of the delivery plan.

Thank you to all Parishes and individuals who took part in our recent community conversations and drop-in sessions across the district libraries. Although any consultation will be imperfect to some we have learned a lot through the process and this is certainly a conversation we know our residents want us to keep open.

Planning Appeal dismissed

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/19/3234882

Land at Junction with Clayhill Road and Sulhamstead Road, Burghfield, Reading, Berkshire

At a time when we are in the process of considering the HELAA (more below), the planning inspector's dismissal of an appeal against WBC's refusal of outline planning permission for the erection of 40 dwellings (24 market and 16 affordable) on land outside the Burghfield settlement boundary is to be welcomed. The inspector upheld WBC's argument that its planning policies were up to date and that it had in excess of a five year housing land supply.

It is clear from conversations with planning officers that this has been a key decision for the whole of WBC in the desire to keep the council as a policy-led planning authority.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

We wrote at length about the HELAA last month, since when we have had the parish engagement events at Thatcham, Calcot and Hungerford. It was good to see the

parishes/neighbourhood development plan groups so well represented and hope that everyone came away with a better understanding than before.
As Sinéad O Donoghue, the Planning Policy Team Leader, has said in a recent email, keep an eye on the 'Planning Policy News' page on the WBC website - <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/planningpolicynews> - where updates will be published.

Comms

The Council uses a variety of communication methods to keep residents informed about the work of the Council including safety messages such as when roads are adversely affected by weather. As well as news items on our website you can also find us on Facebook and Twitter. Below are a few of our Twitter feeds:

[West Berkshire on Twitter @ WestBerkshire](#)

Our main Twitter feed, with information on news and consultations

[West Berkshire Libraries on Twitter @WBerksLibraries](#)

News and information from the West Berkshire Libraries Service on Twitter

[West Berkshire Roads on Twitter @ WBerksRoads](#)

Our Twitter feed with information about roadworks in West Berkshire

[West Berkshire Wellbeing on Twitter @ wellbeing_wb](#)

Our Twitter feed with information about West Berkshire Wellbeing in West Berkshire

[West Berkshire Council's Economic Development team on Twitter @ WBCEcoDev](#)

News and information from the West Berkshire Council's Economic Development team on Twitter

[West Berkshire Building Communities Together team on Twitter @ BCTWestBerks](#)

Our Twitter feed with information our Building Communities Together team

[West Berkshire Public Health and Wellbeing on Twitter @WestBerksPH](#)

Our Twitter feed with information about Public Health and Wellbeing in West Berkshire

[West Berkshire Heritage on Twitter @WbHeritage](#)

Our Twitter feed of news and developments from the West Berkshire Heritage service

Local Matters

Newbury - aerial view

Newbury is named as one of the top European Cities of the Future in a new report by the Financial Times.

The town is in the top-ten Northern European Cities of the Future and also features in the top-25 for the whole of Europe. The Financial Times looks at a range of characteristics including economic potential, business friendliness, human capital and lifestyle, cost-effectiveness and connectivity.

In a boost to the Council's priority to be 'open for business' Newbury is also named in the top-ten Micro European Cities of the Future for business friendliness. At fifth, it is the highest-ranking place in the UK. It comes at a time when the Council is set to adopt a new Economic Development Strategy for the coming years and as planning gets underway for the redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Road Industrial Estate.

There was also good news for the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership - which aims to drive economic growth in the region. It came second in a national ranking of Local Enterprise Partnerships. The report highlighted one Newbury-based example - of Portugal-based telecommunications firm Celfinet which expanded its Newbury office creating 50 jobs and a £3m investment in the area.

Other matters -

Parish Spring clean

If you have not yet organised your community and need to book your litter pick tool kit please get in touch with our Customer Service Team on 01635 551111.

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/communitylitterpick>

Coronavirus

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

What is it?

Novel coronavirus (2019-nCov) is a new strain of coronavirus first identified in Wuhan City, China. As a group, coronaviruses are common across the world.

What are the symptoms?

Typical symptoms of coronavirus include fever and a cough. In some individuals, this may progress to severe pneumonia causing shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. However, the current evidence is that most cases appear to be mild.

Similar to the seasonal Flu, coronavirus can cause more severe symptoms in people with weakened immune systems, older people, and those with long-term conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease.

How are we responding?

There have been no cases of coronavirus in West Berkshire at the time of writing, although we are aware of cases reported nearby. However, we are planning for any eventuality and working across council teams to ensure that, should the worst happen, we are ready.

Nationally, Public Health England are leading on the health response. They are updating their website daily with the latest information, please go to [Wuhan coronavirus information for the public](#) or visit the [NHS website](#)

In the mean time we would like to stress the importance of usual winter illness prevention:

- wash your hands often - with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who are sick
- if you feel unwell, stay at home, do not attend work or school
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in a bin. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces in the home and work environment
- if you are worried about your symptoms, please call NHS 111. **Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment.**

The [NHS website](#) has more information about how you can reduce the possible spread of infection.

Key Links

Latest Information and advice - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public>

Guidance for British people travelling and living overseas
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>

Mr Linden also advised that –

- i) West Berkshire Council has received extra funding from central government to spend on solving the problem of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- ii) Part of the budget for road resurfacing will be used for the A4, up to the boundary with Reading Borough Council.
- iii) The proposed date for discussing the planning application for the development in Pincents Lane is the 1 April, although as additional information has been requested by WBC this date could change.
- iv) The latest round of Member's bids is up again, with the deadline for requests being the 14 May. The panel will meet on the 2 June to consider applications and make their decision.
- v) Approval has been given for a new Community Fire Station in Theale, at a cost of £4m, which will replace the stations in Dee Road, Reading and Pangbourne, and will also house the admin offices.