

Local Issues

Severe Winter Weather Alerts

Week of 26th March saw adverse weather conditions across the district of West Berkshire, we would like to thank the WBC Civil Contingency and Public Health and Wellbeing teams for all the efforts made in keeping communities informed during this time. During this time WBC also undertook other activities in keeping communities safe across the district

1. Gritting of the snow route by the Highways Service
2. Pavement clearance by a joint waste, highways and countryside team
3. Provision of care support to those in the community
4. Extended opening hours (24/7) for the homeless

Theale

WBC hosted 2 drop in sessions at Theale Library on Wednesday 7th March to give residents chance to drop in and discuss any questions/concerns they may have with regard to the new primary school being built on the North Street Playing Fields.

Education Term Times consultation

The consultation ran from 8 January to 16 February 2018. The consultation was published on the West Berkshire Council consultation finder section of the website and was also emailed to stakeholders.

West Berkshire provides the term and holiday dates framework for maintained schools. The framework covers 191 days, which is comprised of 190 “pupil days” and one common training day in September. Schools must also set four other training days from outside of the “pupil days”.

The Council recommends that schools consider aligning term dates with other schools in the area, for example, secondary schools with primary schools, in recognition of families with children at different schools.

42 responses were received in total

West Berkshire Council, Council Meeting Full report available

<http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=116&MId=4396&Ver=4>

At West Berkshire Full Council Meeting of 1st March 2018 there were three important items discussed

a) Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2018/19

It was recommended that The Council’s borrowing limits **be increased by £17 million** in total over the next three years to allow for the additional borrowing to fund proposed capital investment in line with the Capital Strategy and Programme. **This Was adopted.**

The report sets out the framework within which the Treasury Management Team will conduct the council’s investments and borrowing for the forthcoming financial year. It recommends prudential limits for investments in 2018/19 and borrowing limits for the next three years. It also provides a forecast of the Council’s long term borrowing requirements.

- (i) To allow the Council to enter into a loan agreement with an NHS Trust (subject to further approval by Executive);

(ii) To allow the Council **to invest up to £3 million with the CCLA Local Authorities Property Fund**, subject to a further due diligence review to be approved by the Treasury Management Group. It was also proposed to increase the **Council's maximum borrowing limits by £7 million (to £233 million) in 2018/19, by £6 million (to £239 million) in 2019/20 and by £4 million (to £243 million) in 2020/21**. The increase in 2018/19 allows for £12 million new borrowing to fund the 2018/19 capital programme less £5 million repayments of existing loans, which are planned to be made in 2018/19. The increases in 2019/20 and 2020/21 are to allow for the planned level of borrowing to fund the proposed capital programme, less the planned level of debt repayment for those years.

b) Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018/19 to 2020/21

The MTFs should be read in conjunction with the Revenue Budget 2018/19, Capital Strategy and Investment and Borrowing Strategy reports. **This Was approved.**

The aim of the MTFs is to: (1) Allocate available resources focussing on those determined as most critical in supporting the councils priorities and statutory responsibilities (2) Ensure that capital investment is affordable; and (3) Ensure that the Council has sufficient levels of reserves.

The MTFs allocates **£380 million of Council revenue resources** over the next three years and allocates **£43.6 million of Council capital resources** over the next five years. The revenue **funding gap is forecast to reach £23m by 2020/21 prior to any savings plans or increases in income or Council Tax.**

Over the previous eight years, WBC has had to find over **£55m of revenue savings**, which has been achieved through finding efficiencies, making staff reductions, transforming services and generating income.

The Provisional 2018/19 Local Government Finance Settlement

The Secretary of State for local government has approved a bid submitted collectively by the six unitary authorities in Berkshire for the creation of a business rates pilot across Berkshire in 2018/19. This pilot will help the Government develop its detailed proposals to devolve business rate income to local authorities, replacing the current grant funding arrangements.

During the pilot year, it is estimated that an additional £35m of business rates income collected in Berkshire will be retained within the county, rather than being returned to Whitehall as at present. The Berkshire authorities have committed to set aside 70% of the additional funding to make improvements to transport infrastructure in the Reading – Wokingham and Slough – Heathrow corridors, to be taken forward by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The remaining 30% of additional funding will be distributed to the individual local authorities in Berkshire, in proportion to their respective contribution to the overall growth. The pilot has been agreed for one year only.

Funding Gap

The forecast levels of funding over the period of the MTFs, together with provision for budgetary increases, means that West Berkshire Council would be **facing a funding gap of £23m by 2020/21**, before considering Council Tax increases or savings plans.

c) Capital Strategy and Programme 2018/19 to 2022/23

The draft programme allocates £73.6 million of Council capital resources over the next five years. Some proposed capital spending will be financed from capital receipts government capital grants, S106 and CIL.

The Capital Programme helps deliver the key priorities for improvement in the Council Strategy 2015-2019 by proposing investment over the next five years in the following key areas:

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT TO BURGHFIELD PARISH COUNCIL
7TH FEBRUARY 2018
PREPARED BY CLLR CAROL JACKSON-DOERGE & CLLR IAN MORRIN

- **Improving Educational Attainment and Closing the Educational Attainment Gap:** £69.8 million for new school places and improvements to school buildings.
- **Key Infrastructure Improvements in Relation to Roads:** £55.5 million for maintenance and improvement of highways.
- **Regeneration and The Digital Economy:** £4 million to facilitate the delivery of superfast broadband across West Berkshire.
- **Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults:** £15.7 million for occupational health equipment, home adaptations and supported living for vulnerable adults and looked after children and to improve the supply of temporary accommodation for people at risk of becoming homeless.
- **Supporting Communities to do More to Help Themselves:** £3.7 million for maintenance and improvement of parks, open spaces sporting and cultural facilities and £0.5m for grants to support community projects.
- **Becoming and Even More Effective Council - Living Within our Means:** £30m for investment in commercial property in order to generate revenue income to help meet the running costs of Council services.

d) Revenue Budget 2018/19

WBC budgets are particularly under strain as a result of the spiralling cost of adult social care, which represents almost 40% of the council's budget.

It is estimated that by 2036 there will be two adults of working age for every one retired. Successive governments have failed to adequately plan for this challenge.

Like many other councils, it is with regret that WBC proposed a **council tax rise of 5.99%, comprising 2.99% on basic council tax and a 3% adult social care precept**. This was an immensely difficult decision to take.

To put the budget into context, although this increase will generate an additional £5.4 million for the council's budget, a combination of inflation and the removal of RSG mean that WBC actually has less to spend on our essential services.