



Council Report for February 2024

Written by your local Conservative team to keep you up to date.

Councillor Clive Hooker, Downlands Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met on 29 February to discuss:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2024/25
- Capital Strategy Financial Years 2024 to 2034
- Revenue Budget 2024/25

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting is on 26 March.

Executive

Executive met on 8 February to discuss:

- Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Investment and Borrowing Strategy Financial Year 2024-25
- Capital Strategy Financial Years 2024 -2034
- Revenue Budget: 2024-25
- 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Three
- Direct Payment Policy

Papers and a recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

The next meeting is on 14 March.

Environment

Soil Conditioner Giveaway



WBC are hosting another soil conditioner giveaway on 16 and 17 March, open between 10am and 4pm at Padworth Waste Management Facility.

No appointments needed, just show up with proof of West Berkshire residency (ID card or utility bill) and bags or boxes. Residents can then load up the soil conditioner (bagged or boxed only), and enjoy the benefits of this eco-friendly giveaway.

As it's a free event, some queues are likely, but the team will be restocking throughout the day so feel free to arrive between the opening times throughout the weekend.

Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your garden and contribute to sustainability! There are also recycling collection points for vapes, batteries and small electricals.

Great British Spring Clean

This year's campaign, which takes place from 15 March to 31 March, calls on families, neighbours, friends and colleagues to join forces and pledge to pick a bag of litter from local areas in order to protect our communities and precious wildlife habitats.

If residents are organising a community clean-up event for The Great British Spring Clean, WBC can provide litter-picking equipment to help them carry out the event. Please contact the Council with as much notice as possible when requesting equipment, and wait for confirmation before you advertise your event as our equipment may not be available due to popular demand.



Economy

Berkshire Prosperity Board

Proposals to create a new Berkshire Prosperity Board to help drive forward and deliver future economic success across the county are set to be endorsed by all six Berkshire Councils.

Under the government's proposals, all six councils would work together to help seize opportunities to promote Berkshire to investors, businesses and Central Government.

The new Prosperity Board would aim to drive and deliver economic prosperity across Berkshire with the aim of securing more funding, creating more jobs and enabling more affordable housing for residents.

Berkshire is already seeing growing industries, such as the film industry in and around Arborfield, Shinfield, Winnersh and Bray, and by working together it can harness future funding and provide a good base for investors to grow and develop.

Health

Conference

The West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board will be holding its Annual Conference from 9:30am - 1:30pm on Friday 19 April in the Council Offices at Market Street, Newbury.

The theme for this year's conference is 'Primary Care and Community Outreach' which picks up a number of key issues that have been highlighted as being important to the local community and shows how these are being addressed.

As well as highlighting the work of the Board and its partners, there will be presentations on the new Primary Care Strategy, general practice, dentistry, pharmacy, and the new Community Wellness Outreach Service. There will also be a marketplace where delegates can network and meet a range of local service providers before and after the event.

The conference will be held as a hybrid event, which people can join remotely via Zoom or attend in person. All delegates will have the opportunity to take part in the Q&A sessions with the speakers.

The conference is open to all and is free to attend. With just 70 places available for those attending in person, early registration is encouraged to avoid disappointment. To book your place, please follow the link [here](#).

Lets Get Active funding



The Let's Get Active Fund (LGAF) is back, with £40,000 available to improve access to physical activities in West Berkshire.

Since it started in 2019, the LGAF partnership between West Berkshire Council and Greenham Trust has helped many community groups, organisations, social enterprises, charities, and schools to start or enhance physical activity initiatives.

Previous funded projects include the 'Donnington Castle' play structure for Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish Council, football/rugby hybrid nets and a permanent wheelchair-accessible table tennis table for East Ilsley Parish Council, and a community basketball hub for children based in Theale for Reading Rockets basketball club.

The grants cover a wide range of opportunities from improving existing facilities, buying new sports equipment, providing new instructors and coaches, or starting new initiatives.

Community groups in West Berkshire looking to help promote physical activity in the district, should visit the [website](#) or email elisabeth.gowens1@westberks.gov.uk for more information.

Communities

Ukraine

This month marked two years since the start of the war in Ukraine.

In those two years, the Homes for Ukraine scheme has helped 700 Ukrainian guests make West Berkshire their home, and they have been supported by many kind and generous hosts. On Wednesday 21 February, WBC welcomed the Ukrainian guests and hosts to a commemorative ceremony at Shaw House.

Immersive History

Be immersed in history with a free day out in the 17th century with The Earl Rivers Regiment Muster (Members of The Sealed Knot) at Shaw House on Saturday 9 March, 11am-4pm.



Witness reenactors training to use swords, muskets and pikes, and visit some of the tradesmen and civilians who accompanied the armies. There will also be 'Living History' demonstrations inside Shaw House.

Check the Charity Bank



Residents are encouraged to recycle old textiles responsibly by donating saleable clothing items to charity shops, using registered charity collection banks or Council-provided collection points across the district.

This advice follows the emergence of several unaffiliated textile banks across the district that are being investigated due to suspected false claims that they 'support people in need'. Clothing banks spotted in

Milton Keynes and Northampton have shown some containers were owned by a limited company and not a charity.

It's important to be aware of these potentially misleading clothes banks, as any clothing and shoes deposited in such containers may not benefit charitable causes or be disposed of in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Education

Curridge Primary School in top 1% for phonics

Congratulations to everyone at Curridge Primary School for their outstanding phonics results.

They've been recognised in the top one per cent in the country for phonics results after all the pupils in Year 1 pupils achieved the expected standard last year.

Minister of State for Schools, Damian Hinds MP wrote to the students congratulating them on this fantastic achievement.



Transport

Car Club

West Berkshire's Car Club provider, Enterprise, offers flexible access to fuel efficient and hybrid cars across the district. The car club gives residents 24/7 pay-as-you-go access to vehicles parked on streets, car parks and Enterprise branches across the district via the mobile app or online.

Over the next few months, Enterprise will be in the process of improving their rental experience by upgrading their in-vehicle technology and mobile app. This will involve using the Enterprise Car Club app to access the keys, the fuel pin location, and extending your reservation.

Current Consultations

None at present.

Thames Valley Police

I was recently at a briefing from TVP and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Matt Barber. I learnt that they now have more police officers than ever at over 5,000. They have challenges around retention but recruitment is strong. By the end of the year the number of officers in neighbourhood teams will have doubled. This is good news for parishes in Downlands Ward, as we rely heavily on one of these teams for our policing.

This is part of their Crime Fighting Plan, under which 101 response times have improved. The PCC has allocated £300k of funding for a Safer Streets initiative within the Plan. This is expected to lead to an increase of reported figures as people come forward more readily to report crimes. Reporting from convenience stores has increase by a third as TVP have encouraged engagement from them.

Hampshire Hospitals

Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB (Integrated Care Board) have consulted publicly on their Hampshire Together plans. ICBs are statutorily responsible for the development of plans to meet the health needs of populations. This consultation is in respect of their plans to create a new acute hospital and to refurbish Winchester hospital.

Options for the new hospital would include a site in Basingstoke and anyone who wishes to respond to the consultation should follow the link [here](#).