



Council Report for March 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 26 March to discuss:

- 2024/25 West Berkshire Council Timetable of Public Meetings
- Establishment of Joint Committee - Berkshire Prosperity Board
- Statutory Pay Policy 2024/25
- Creation of Service Director for Delivering Better Value and SEND Transformation

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

The next meeting is on 9 May.

Executive

Executive met on 14 March to discuss:

- Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter Three
- Berkshire Prosperity Board
- Building Control Shared Service Agreement
- Hackney Carriage Tariffs 2024
- Response to Garage Block Motion
- Contracts for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive
- Restrictive covenants and Restriction on Title - Windmill Court and Stafford House Mortimer
- Asset Disposal - Sainsbury's

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

The next meeting is on 16 May.

Elections

Police and Crime Commissioner

An official notice has been given for the Police and Crime Commissioner election for the Thames Valley on Thursday 2 May. The PCC is responsible for making sure Thames Valley Police is an efficient and effective force. They are answerable to you. For more information visit the Choose my PCC [website](#).

There are no local elections for West Berkshire Council or Parishes this year.

Residents need to be registered in order to vote - they have until Tuesday 16 April to do this. To register please visit [gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

Residents who have already registered to vote will receive a poll card telling them where the polling station is.

Money

Budget Approved

Spending on services and infrastructure across West Berkshire from April was approved by Council.

The 2024/25 budget will see £174m delivering services across the district and £50m on infrastructure and improvement projects.

Council Tax

Annual council tax bills have started arriving on doormats.

The bill will explain how much council tax is owed in 2024/25, as well as how much WBC will be collecting on behalf of the fire and police services, and town or parish councils.

How much a resident pays depends on the value of your property, and the money is spent providing a wide range of services across the district, supporting communities and helping the district develop to meet future need.

Residents who pay by direct debit don't need to do anything – the payments will be adjusted accordingly beginning with the scheduled April payment.

More information is available on the Council Tax [webpages](#) including:

- Paying your council tax
- Council Tax Reduction, Discounts and Exemptions
- Telling WBC you've changed your address

Environment

Grants available following flooding

Many households and businesses were impacted by Storm Henk between 2 to 12 January 2024. HM Government have understood the challenges being faced and have given support to councils to provide various flood recovery grants.

Here's a summary of the assistance available but please note each grant has a different deadline date:

- Flooded households in eligible affected areas, who can apply for up to £500 cash to help with immediate costs.
- Households and businesses significantly affected, who will be eligible for 100% council tax and business rates relief for at least 3 months.
- Small-to-medium sized businesses in eligible affected areas, who can apply for up to £2,500 from the Business Recovery Grant to help them return quickly to business as usual.
- Eligible flood-hit property owners, who can apply for up to £5,000 to help make their homes and businesses more resilient to future flooding via the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme.
- Farmers who have suffered uninsurable damage to their land will be able to apply for grants of up to £25,000 through the Farming Recovery Fund towards repair and reinstatement costs for farmers adversely affected by exceptional flooding.

Residents or businesses in West Berkshire who may qualify should visit the WBC [website](#) for further information and to complete the necessary forms.

Household Waste Recycling Centre Opening Hours Update

Following the recent consultation, WBC are updating the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) hours. Starting from 1 April 2024, weekday (Monday-Friday, excluding bank holidays) operating hours will be adjusted to 11am-6pm. Rest assured, weekend and bank holiday hours will continue as usual from 9am-6pm (including Easter Monday).

They are making these changes to increase efficiency as both sites are not being fully utilised, meaning several appointments not used every day. This will also see savings of approximately £59,000 annually.



Residents can book appointments and ensure their household is registered for a permit on the website: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/recyclingcentres>

Planning and Development

New digital planning service launches

As part of the work to move planning services online and to make them more accessible and easier to navigate, WBC have launched a free online service which will allow residents to check if they need to apply for planning permission.

This new service will make it easier to understand if a planning application is needed for items such as solar panels, loft conversions, adding an outbuilding or adding a dropped kerb. This service makes planning information simpler and more transparent for applicants and ensures consistency of guidance.

Local land charges migration

WBC are working with HM Land Registry to migrate the local land charges service to the new central digital register.

When this process is complete, HM Land Registry will provide search results for local land charges searches in the West Berkshire area.

An exact date for when this service will go live will be announced in due course.

Local land charges searches are normally required in the property-buying process. Most local land charges are restrictions or prohibitions on the use of the property. The local land charges search will reveal whether a property is subject to a charge if that charge has been registered.

Community

Hungerford 'changing places' pod

A bespoke Changing Places Pod that will offer fully accessible toilet and changing facilities is to be installed in the Church Street Car Park in Hungerford.

The Pod is specially designed to support disabled people who need assistance in their day-to-day lives and is large enough to accommodate a person and their carer.

It will provide a fully accessible toilet, plus a height adjustable changing bench and basin, as well as a hoist. The costs of the Pod have been covered by a £40,000 grant from Changing Places and £60,000 from West Berkshire's Community Infrastructure Levy.



Once the Pod is operational, it will be assessed by Changing Places so that it can be added to the official Changing Places map so that people can find it easily. There are currently 2,241 registered Changing Places toilets in the UK.

Transport

New Cycle Parking in Cold Ash



West Berkshire Council contributed £3,000 to a volunteer-led initiative (co-ordinated through Cold Ash Parish Council) to install a cycle shelter with covered space to park up to ten bikes, at Cold Ash Recreation Ground, next to the Acland Hall.

The new cycle parking facilities gives people the option of cycling to activities held at the recreation ground or the Acland Hall.

West Berkshire Council is working with stakeholders to provide cycle parking at other destinations, following on from the Active Travel 'Heat Map' consultation. The Council remains open to considering proposals for similar sites. Other locations where WBC have recently installed cycle parking include Yattendon Square and The Croft in Hungerford.

Encouraging and enabling active travel (offering many residents an alternative for some or all of their local, shorter-distance journeys) is in line with the Council Strategy Priority of tackling the climate and ecological emergency.

Leisure

Northcroft Lido welcomes back swimmers

Northcroft Lido reopened its doors to the public for its first full season on Thursday 28 March.

Due to extreme weather this winter, the facility will be opening gradually, starting with the lane swimming that Lido enthusiasts have been eagerly waiting for. WBC will fully reopen the site with slides and splash pad once the groundwater levels at the Lido have dropped.



Easter Holiday, Activities and Food programme

The Holiday, Activities and Food (HAF) programme is back for Easter!

This programme offers free holiday club places for children and young people eligible for free school meals.

One of the providers is the Andrew Simpson Foundation where young people can try out water sports.

Water sports are also available at Waterside Centre Newbury and they have lots of spaces ready to be filled.

Current Consultations

- [Proposed nominations for the Local List of Heritage Assets \(March 2024\)](#) – Closes 12th May 2024
- [Proposed Licensed Hackney Carriage \(Taxi\) Fares](#) – Closes 11th April 2024

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