



Council Report for November 2023

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

Cllr Paul Dick, Chieveley and Cold Ash Ward

West Berkshire Council

Council

Council met on 30 November to discuss:

- Update on the Appointment of and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2023/24 Municipal Year
- Delivery of Public Health functions in West Berkshire
- Statement of Licensing Policy - Review and Consultation

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

The next meeting is on 29 February.

Executive

Executive met on 2 and 23 November to discuss:

- New Procurement Strategy 2023 - 2027
- Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report
- Review of the Newbury Sports Hub Development
- Response to Council Motion on 20mph Speed Limits
- Contracts for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive
- Night Warden Service
- Property Investment Strategy Review
- The future of West Street House
- Medium Term Financial Strategy and 2024-25 revenue budget proposal consultations

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

The next meeting is on 14 December.

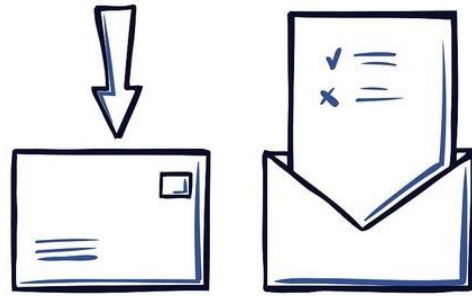
Democracy

Changes to Postal Votes

The application process for postal votes has changed with a new online service being launched.

Applicants must now include their National Insurance Number on all future postal vote applications for verification purposes. Paper applications will still be valid, but voters must use the new version of the form.

If old versions of the application are received, these will have to be returned to applicants for the addition of a National Insurance Number, or a fresh application can be completed if preferred.



Residents who already have a postal vote don't need to do anything. Postal votes will no longer be permanent and will last for three years, with effect from 31st October. Any existing postal vote users will be asked to renew their application in 2026. Any new applications from electors can be made online or on a paper form.

Economy

WBC Budget

Work has started on the 2024/25 budget with a challenging financial position set to continue into next year.

An increase in demand for services, inflation making them more expensive to deliver and funding below the rate of inflation means there is a £14m gap between the income WBC expect to receive and forecast spending requirements for next year.

A consultation is taking place on the following measures:

- Restructure car parking fees (increase)
- Close or find an alternative provider to run Willows Edge Care Home
- Reduce the frequency of grass cutting
- Restructure funding for Adult Social Care transport services
- Reduce funding for gully emptying and bridge maintenance
- Reduce dog waste and non-town centre litter bins
- Reduce the opening hours of the Household Waste Recycling Centres
- Reduce the frequency of annual weed treatments
- Reduce contributions to community transport
- Restructure Adult Social Care Care-Home charges

More details can be found online at: westberks.gov.uk/consultations

Small Biz Saturday

Small Business Saturday (SBS) is a campaign to celebrate the UK's amazing small businesses. It encourages customers to shop locally and support small businesses in their communities.

This year it takes place on 2 December.

It is totally free to take part in and open to all small businesses, bringing a phenomenal opportunity to be in the spotlight.

Many small businesses take part in the campaign by hosting events and offering promotions.

SBS offers a daily programme of online events, including workshops, webinars, and mentoring, as well as highlighting entrepreneurial stories.

Residents can sign up and join in by visiting the Small Business Saturday website: smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com

Young People and Families

Youth Forum

The West Berkshire Youth Forum is a group that has been set up for young people within West Berkshire who have SEND and are aged between 15-25.

The focus of the group is to give the young people a platform to express themselves. They get the chance to meet new people in a safe environment, have a meal out, make friendships that they can develop outside of the group and build a community within the group.

The Youth Forum meets once a month for two hours. Residents who are interested in joining the group, should contact: Youthforum@westberks.gov.uk

New block at The Willink officially open

WBC have officially opened a brilliant new learning space at The Willink School in Burghfield.

The project, which cost almost £3 million, provided the two-storey building to make sure there was room for 75 more pupils from a nearby new housing development and to give everyone at the school the best possible learning and teaching environment.

Childcare support that fits the family



childcarechoices.gov.uk brings together all the existing childcare offers in one place so parents can get the help that fits their family. This could be through Tax-Free Childcare, 30 Hours Childcare, or Universal Credit Childcare. Some families might be eligible to use more than one childcare scheme.

From next year, even more help is on the way:

From April 2024, eligible working parents in England with children aged 2 will have access to 15 hours childcare

From September 2024, the 15 hours childcare offer will be expanded to eligible working parents in England with children between 9 and 23 months old.

From September 2025, eligible working parents in England with children between 9 months up to school age will have access to 30 hours childcare

There will also be more support for primary school aged children. From September 2024, parents will see an expansion in the availability of childcare in their local area before and after school, between 8am and 6pm, also known as 'wraparound care'.

Transport

Extension of £2 Bus Fare

HM Government has announced that the Single Fare Cap Scheme has now been extended to 31 December 2024. The scheme provides affordable bus travel for everyone across England, allowing passengers to travel at any time of the day for £2 (£4 return).

The following service enhancements have also been introduced:

- A new late evening service, operated by Newbury & District, between Newbury and Thatcham on Fridays and Saturdays called the 1e.
- Reading Buses Lime 2a has been extended to serve Mortimer every 2 hours on Sundays.



- Thames Travel's X34 service now operates between Newbury and Harwell Campus/Didcot providing a link to employment and retail opportunities.
- An early bird concessionary fare ticket has been introduced, allowing those with a valid concessionary bus pass to travel for discounted rates before 0930am Monday to Friday.
- A Connect Group Day ticket is available allowing unlimited use for up to 4 people on valid routes.

Why not use the bus to get to work, go shopping, attend an appointment, go for a bite to eat in the local eateries, take in some of the outstanding scenery, or meet friends and family!

Free Bus Travel

Get ready for a jolly holiday season filled with free bus travel in West Berkshire! This year, residents can once again embrace the festive spirit without worrying about transport costs.

For a series of Saturdays in December, all bus journeys within West Berkshire will be FREE, providing an excellent chance to explore and enjoy various seasonal events and activities in the run up to Christmas!

Mark your calendars for these special days:

- Saturday 16 December 2023: Head to the vibrant Newbury Christmas Artisan Market
- Saturday 23 December 2023: Dive into the last weekend of Christmas shopping or steam into Christmas at Didcot Railway Centre and help Santa find his missing reindeer!

Residents who start their journey in West Berkshire, can have a return journey also free! But they need to request a return ticket from the driver when boarding to take advantage of this offer.

For more information on the buses taking part, click here: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/42442/Festive-Cheer-with-Free-Bus-Travel-in-West-Berkshire-this-Christmas>

AI road maintenance

In a bold stride toward efficiency, WBC are revolutionising road maintenance with Artificial Intelligence (AI). The partnership with Vaisala sees AI technology integrated into some of the inspection vehicles, digitally capturing images of road conditions, signs, and markings. This innovative approach allows us to predict potential faults, optimising decisions for future investments and maintenance.

The AI's analytical prowess provides layered data analysis, mapping out defects efficiently. This ground-breaking initiative not only ensures a proactive approach to road management, but also significantly reduces costs as WBC are committed to driving progress and safety on West Berkshire's roads.

Wiltshire Connect is coming to Hungerford

Wiltshire Connect is a new type of service that operates on pre-bookable, on-demand basis in the Pewsey Vale and Marlborough area. This service will be extending to include the Marlborough and Hungerford operating zone on Monday 30 October 2023. Residents will be able to pre-book a ride anywhere within this zone, including local journeys within Hungerford.

Bookings can be made via their app or by telephone on: 01225 712900.



Wiltshire Connect also operates a number of timetabled services, and from Monday 30 October 2023 the 110 service will operate between Hungerford and Marlborough via Bedwyn. Passengers may board the service without a prior booking at most locations where a time is shown on the timetable. Residents are advised to check whether they should book a trip before travelling.

Community

Warm Spaces

West Berkshire Council is supporting communities to come together and create welcoming spaces where people can come to stay warm and enjoy some company, a hot drink and get some advice from partner organisations on local support such as foodbanks and HM Government's Household Support Fund.

During the pandemic, WBC teamed up with community groups to co-produce a special Connecting Communities Together map where residents can find the locations and information on when the Welcome Spaces are open.

There are currently 21 Community Welcome Spaces across West Berkshire. If there are any community spaces that would like to be added to the map, they can email rlys.lewis@westberks.gov.uk

HAF is back for Christmas

WBC's very successful Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme is running again this Christmas to support vulnerable children and those eligible for free school meals. HAF offers holiday club activities, fully funded by the Department for Education, which focuses on enriching experiences, physical activity along with a healthy meal each day.

They are looking to increase the offer to children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families. Community groups that support SEND, or a holiday club provider that has capacity to support SEND children over the holiday periods or a specialist SEND club provider, should contact the HAF Coordinator at hannah.lee1@westberks.gov.uk

Current Consultations

- [Review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations 2023](#) – closes 12 December
- [Draft Corporate Complaints Policy](#) – closes 13 December
- [Four Houses Corner Traveller site near Ufton Nervet](#) – closes 15 December
- [Proposal to extend and vary the current Public Spaces Protection Order \(PSPO\) in Newbury Town Centre](#) – closes 18 December
- [Proposed Fees for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operator's Licences 2024/25](#) – closes 18 December
- [Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople](#) – Call for Sites – closes 22 December
- [Berkshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) – closes 31 December
- [Francis Baily Primary School - School Streets Scheme Feedback Survey](#) – closes 3 March 2024

Parish Matters

As a Councillor, I continue to support ward residents with individual concerns and issues, from speeding and road drainage to housing and planning problems. I also play a full part in the various Council committees, including hearing licensing applications and I chair the Covid Recovery Task and Finish Group. I was also pleased that the recent Members Bids, supported by both ward members, were successful in securing funding for local causes.