

13 May 2022



Chief Executive

West Berkshire Council
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Good afternoon

This week has been a busy one for us as we held our Annual Council Meeting on Tuesday. This meeting is one of our most important of the municipal year as it sees the appointment of a new Chairman and the allocation of positions for the Executive, the Health and Wellbeing Board, our Planning Committees and other internal boards, as well as our representatives on external bodies such as the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel.

The Chairman's role is a key one in any local authority. They act as the formal representative of the Council and considered the "first citizen" of the district. As well as chairing meetings of full Council, they officiate at civic functions and welcome distinguished visitors of national and international significance on behalf of the district. This year, Councillor Rick Jones will serve as our Chairman. Rick is a long-serving member of the Council and represents Tilehurst and Purley ward, in the east of the district. He has previously served as Executive Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Internal Governance as well as Vice Chairman of Council this past year, so we are confident that his experience will ensure he is an excellent advocate for West Berkshire.

The meeting saw us welcome a new member to the Executive Committee: Councillor Tom Marino. Tom will be taking up the Internal Governance portfolio where he will oversee a vital range of functions including legal and democratic services, digital, ICT and HR. We also said goodbye to Councillor Hilary Cole, who has left the Executive after many years of service. The support and leadership she has brought to the authority since she was elected in 2007 has been exemplary and she will be missed. She will, however, continue to serve her Chieveley ward constituents and will be an active member of full Council.

We were delighted to receive some news worthy of celebrating last week when the recent Ofsted inspection of our Children and Family Services found that we have retained our 'Good' rating. To have achieved this result at any time is a significant result as it places our services for young people in need among the top 50 in the country; however it is testament to the dedication of our teams and the investment we have made that this has been done in the midst of the pandemic and in the context of increasing demand.

Two particular phrases in the report were particularly good to read: the first of these was that the 'commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children and families' shown by our 'strong, stable and child-focused leadership team' was highlighted. The second was that it said that unaccompanied children arriving in West Berkshire are 'met with kindness', which is something that we have ensured is the case during a number of international crises.

We are so proud of this result and of the care children and young people in need receive in West Berkshire. If you would like to read more, or see the whole report, this can be found on our website:

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/39801/Children-s-Services-retain-Good-rating>

We also received some disappointing news this week when the Minister of State for Housing allowed the Bloor Homes and Sandleford Partnership appeal against our decision to refuse their planning application at Sandleford Park (East).

Many local people will know that it has long been our ambition to build out the allocated Sandleford Strategic Site, which will bring much needed housing to Newbury, and that this has formed part of our planning policy for a number of years. We are and always have been a plan-led authority and have consistently sought to ensure that all developments properly balance provision of much-needed housing with the district's infrastructure and environmental needs. It was our judgement that the Bloor Homes application was unacceptable for a number of reasons, including impact on woodlands, trees, biodiversity, landscape, and inadequate provision of emergency access, public transport, affordable housing mix and sustainable energy generation.

In the lead up to, and during, the Inquiry, Bloor Homes submitted a series of changes seeking to overcome those concerns. Following its conclusion, we will now encourage and seek to engage in pre-application discussions positively and pro-actively with the applicants, to ensure that forthcoming reserved matters applications deliver high quality, sustainable development that has a positive impact on our district.

We have recently established a new Planning Newsletter which will provide updates on our work as we move towards the next phase of the development of our Local Plan. You can sign up to this, as well as 20 other topics, at [westberks.gov.uk/signup](https://www.westberks.gov.uk/signup)

We finish by wishing you and your families a happy and healthy fortnight ahead.

Yours sincerely,



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