

B) Customer Services and West Berkshire District Council

The Council invited the newly-appointed Customer Services Manager at WBDC to meet us and discussed some areas where there can be confusion regarding services provided by our different authorities. The meeting was very useful and it was agreed to meet on an occasional basis to address customer services matters.

C) “Learning Time” Parish training facility with WBDC

West Berkshire District Council's staff training and development portal includes a range of courses of generic relevance to all local authority employees, such as health and Safety, Equality and Diversity, Freedom of Information and Data Protection. In many larger authorities these training courses are mandatory for all employees. The Parish Councils generally do not have the resources to provide this training and outside expertise can be costly, especially for smaller parishes. I worked with the corporate training staff in WBDC to encourage them to open up this facility to the parishes and I am pleased to report that it is now available to all parishes in West Berkshire at a very reasonable cost of £50 per employee.

D) All staff meeting with the Leader on 9 March

This has now become a regular item on the staff calendar, when the Leader of the Council meets all of the Council's staff, including the honorary officers of the Civic Team. It normally happens shortly after the budget is approved and it is an opportunity for all staff to meet the leader and discuss the Council's aims and objectives for the coming year.

3. West Berkshire District Council devolution portal

West Berkshire Council launched a new website in support of those town and parish councils that are interested in having more say in the delivery of local services.

The website address is <http://parish.westberks.gov.uk>

On the website you will find a list of services – such as grass cutting and path maintenance – which town and parish councils can become more involved in. It also provides more information about each service, advice about the tools and equipment needed and insurance cover and the next steps if you are interested in taking it further. There is also more advice about taking on community assets as well as:

- Information about a £400,000 fund to help get councils started – offered in partnership with Greenham Common Trust
- Advice on clustering with neighbouring councils or setting up a Community Interest Company
- Facts and figures about your town/parish

This Council has submitted expressions of interest in the following assets and services:

- The rest of Victoria Park
- Goldwell Park
- Northcroft Park
- Greenham House gardens (which we already maintain but was never transferred to us)
- The library Building at Wash Common
- The Community Centre at Wash Common
- Town centre maintenance services, such as cleaning signs and dealing with pavement obstructions

None of this is compulsory for parishes and at this stage these submissions are nothing more than an expression of interest, which do not commit this Council in any way. Officers will negotiate with WBDC and any proposed devolution or transfers will require approval at Council or Committee level.

