

# DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022

**Councillors Present:** Lynne Doherty (Chairman), Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Ross Mackinnon, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart and Howard Woollaston,

**Also Present:** Councillors Lee Dillon, Geoff Mayes and Erik Pattenden.

**Members and Officers Present Remotely:** Councillors Tom Marino, Adrian Abbs, Carolyne Culver, Alan Macro and Andy Sharp (Executive Director – People)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillors Jeff Brooks and Tony Vickers

**Officers Present:** Sarah Clarke (Service Director Strategy & Governance), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources), Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) Eric Owens (Executive Director – Place) and Lizzie Reeves (Project Manager - MC, OS)

### PART I

#### 56. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

#### 57. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### 58. Public Questions

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As](#).

#### 59. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

#### 60. Capital Financial Performance Report Quarter Two 2022/23 (EX4270)

Councillor Ross Mackinnon introduced and proposed the recommendation within the Capital Financial Performance Report (Agenda Item 6), which reported on the forecast under or over spends against the Council's approved capital budget as at Quarter Two of 2022/23.

Councillor Lee Dillon suggested that the cost of re-profiling the £17.9 million into the following year was likely to have risen given the increase in interest rates and inflation and queried where the calculation sat within the paper. Joseph Holmes, Executive Director, Resources explained that generally the cost would be rolled forward, but would also be dependent on how advanced the project was and whether any expenses had already been incurred.

Councillor Mackinnon agreed to review the feasibility of providing Councillor Dillon with a breakdown of the re-profiled projects and any costs incurred in order to allow for the re-profiling.

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Councillor Dillon queried the impact on people caused by delay to some of the projects, suggesting the Downland Sports Centre and impact to students as an example.

Councillor Dillon further commented that the greyscale bar charts were difficult to read and suggested using colour, given that it was a public document.

Councillor Dominic Boeck seconded the report.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- Members approve the proposed reprofiling of £17.9 million of future expenditure from 2022/23 into financial year 2023/24.
- Members note the increase in expenditure budget for the Castle at Theale School project, which will be fully funded through additional Department for Education High Needs Provision Capital Fund Grant. See section 6.1 of this report.

### **61. 2022/23 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Two (EX4269)**

Councillor Ross Mackinnon introduced the Revenue Financial Performance Report (Agenda Item 7), which detailed the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and provided a year-end forecast, as at Quarter Two of 2022/23.

Councillor Alan Macro drew attention to section 4.5, page 43 of the Agenda Pack which reported that Adult Social Care long term services were predicting a £3m overspend. Councillor Macro suggested that almost half of the overspend was due to low occupancy within Council run care homes. Further, Councillor Macro noted that there had been increased spending incurred to place clients in private care homes. Councillor Macro queried why this was occurring when there were plenty of spaces within the Council's own care homes.

Councillor Mackinnon explained that private care homes were being utilised for those clients with complex needs who could not be serviced by the Council care homes.

Councillor Jo Stewart further added that it had not been possible to place clients within the Birchwood Care Home for a time, but that further to a recent Care Quality Commission rating of 'improving', clients could now be placed there again. Councillor Macro commented that it was good news and commended all Officers and staff involved in the improvement at Birchwood Care Home.

Councillor Erik Pattenden queried whether the Children and Family Services model was fit for purpose if it was unable to take into account inflation and an increase in demand.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that no model would ever be perfect, and the fact that it had not correctly forecast demand did not mean that it was inaccurate. In relation to inflation Councillor Mackinnon commented that in February inflation had been 5.4% and not been forecast to reach such high levels but conversely to reduce. Councillor Mackinnon suggested that it would have been impossible to predict the extent of the increase.

Councillor Pattenden noted that the model had incorrectly forecast Quarter One and Quarter Two and queried whether it would be the same for Quarter Three. Councillor Mackinnon explained that the budget had been set in March, based on client numbers at that time.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that in relation to the data for Children, the numbers were smaller but the volatility could be greater due to a small number of individuals having very complex needs.

Councillor Pattenden queried what mitigation was in place to avoid future overspend. Councillor Lynne Doherty explained that a risk reserve was set aside to take account of

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any fluctuations in the modelling, and that increased demand was a widespread national issue which had been recognised in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care final report.

Councillor Pattenden queried what actions had been taken to ensure a fair funding settlement from Central Government. Councillor Mackinnon responded that Members of the Executive had robustly lobbied Central Government over the preceding few months and that details were expected the following week.

Referring to mitigation, Councillor Lee Dillon queried whether the Council could act as a host and provide services to other local authorities. Councillor Boeck responded that such an approach had been tried at Castle Gate Respite Centre with beds offered to Hampshire and Oxfordshire, but that there was no longer any availability due to increased demand. Further, he noted that twelve additional places for secondary aged SEMH children had just been created at The Castle School, Theale, and that plans were in place to offer a similar facility for primary school children at Kennet Valley Primary School.

Councillor Doherty suggested greater use of in-house foster carers and made a plea for anyone interested to register.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Note the forecast £3m over spend, after taking account of provision that was made in reserves for specific risks at the time of budget setting. Without this provision, the forecast would be an over spend of £7.8m.
- Note that proposed mitigations totalling £1.9m could reduce the overspend to £1.1m.

## **62. Financial Year 2022/23 Mid-Year Treasury Report (GE4308)**

Councillor Ross Mackinnon introduced the Mid-Year Treasury Report (Agenda Item 8), which provided an overview of the treasury management activity for financial year 2022/23 as at 30 September 2022.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The report is to note only. The Section 151 Officer is satisfied that treasury management practices in year have operated in accordance with the approved performance management criteria.

## **63. Grazeley Solar Farm Project Update (EX4293)**

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter introduced and proposed the recommendations within the report (Agenda Item 9), which provided an update to the business case for the Grazeley Solar Farm project and sought delegated authority for the Service Director (Environment), to enter into a power purchase agreement to supply energy through the Crown Commercial Services Heat Networks and Electricity Generation Assets (HELGA) Framework.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter explained that the preferred option of the two outlined was Option Two, which proposed connection to the grid via AWE's Burghfield substation.

Councillor Graham Bridgman noted that the site was within his ward and that he had been asked by Wokefield Parish Council to note that the site was within Wokefield, not Grazeley.

Councillor Bridgman made a plea that James Lane not damaged or excavated, if avoidable.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to section 4.4 of the report and stated that the actual site was larger than the Solar Farm currently planned and queried why connection to both

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locations was not being explored. He further queried whether there was any allocation for storage.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter responded that storage was still under consideration and there was still space to add it.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter acknowledged that whilst the site was larger, consultants had recommended that the Council continue with the plot size outlined. Councillor Abbs requested sight of the consultant's report.

It was clarified that section 5.20 of the report referred to West Berkshire Council's carbon footprint rather than that of the overall district.

Councillor Lee Dillon voiced his support for the project and welcomed the cleaner, greener energy that would be produced in West Berkshire as a result of the Solar Farm.

**Recommendation** (Vote to be taken in Part II):

- That the updated business case be noted and that the Executive give delegated authority for the Service Director Environment, in consultation with the S151 and Monitoring Officers, to approve registering as an energy supplier on the Crown Commercial Services Heat Networks and Electricity Generation Asset (HELGA) Framework and entering into of a Power Purchase Agreement for up to 30 years for the supply of electricity through said framework.

**Other options considered:**

- Consideration is being given to using the solar farm for sheep farming during its life. Biodiversity and ecology is also prominent in the scheme design. The project retains the current features that are present on the site, such as the mature trees and hedges. We have allowed a ten metre buffer between these existing features and the fenced solar farm area, hence ensuring there is no damage to the existing flora and fauna in the field boundaries. In addition to this, the proposed scheme design includes additional tree and hedge planting, the creation of ponds and seeding with wildflower seed-mix, and seeding for winter birds. The scheme will also include the installation of bird and bat boxes across the site. All of these measures have been captured in the Biodiversity Net gain score, which is positive.

### 64. **Contract Award for the Children and Young Peoples Therapies Service (EX4181)**

Councillor Dominic Boeck introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which sought authority to enter into an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) to work in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council (Lead Authority) & Brighter Futures For Children Ltd (Reading) to deliver the Children and Young People's Integrated Therapies Service.

Councillor Erik Pattenden referred to section 5.18 of the report which stated that the service had been stretched, with some children not receiving the therapy set out in their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Councillor Pattenden queried how many children had been affected, given that it was a statutory service. Councillor Boeck agreed to investigate and provide details following the meeting.

Councillor Boeck explained that the contract would be monitored following the usual contract management system (as detailed at 5.16 of the report), and that should demand exceed the level of service provision outlined, the contract would be reviewed.

Councillor Lee Dillon expressed support for the paper and requested assurance that it would prevent future failures in provision of the statutory service to children.

Councillor Boeck expressed confidence that the agreement would enable the Council to meet its statutory commitments.

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### **Recommendation** (Vote to be taken in Part II):

- The Executive resolves to approve the Inter Authority Agreement with Wokingham Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children Limited (Reading Borough Council) for integrated therapies service under a contract let by Wokingham Borough Council and to delegate authority to Service Lead Legal & Democratic Services in consultation with Head of Education to finalise and enter into the IAA.

### **Other options considered:**

- Undertake full tender for West Berkshire Council only. This option was considered and discounted as partnering with neighbouring authorities will achieve economies of scale and better value for money.
- Do nothing and let the current contract lapse with no future provision. This is not an option due to the statutory nature of the service
- Provide the service in-house. The Council do not have the necessary skills to deliver this service and it is not considered economically viable to pursue this option.

### **65. Members' Questions**

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As.](#)

### **66. Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED that:** members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 3 and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006. Rule 8.10.4 of the Constitution also refers.

### **67. Grazeley Solar Farm Project Update (EX4293)**

*(Paragraph 6 - information relating to proposed action to be taken by the Local Authority)*

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 13), concerning an update on the business case for the Grazeley Solar Farm project and to seek delegated authority for the Service Director Environment to enter into a power purchase agreement to supply energy through the Crown Commercial Services Heat Networks and Electricity Generation Assets (HELGA) Framework.

**RESOLVED that:** the recommendations in the exempt report be agreed.

### **Other options considered:**

- Consideration is being given to using the solar farm for sheep farming during its life. Biodiversity and ecology is also prominent in the scheme design. The project retains the current features that are present on the site, such as the mature trees and hedges. We have allowed a ten metre buffer between these existing features and the fenced solar farm area, hence ensuring there is no damage to the existing flora and fauna in the field boundaries. In addition to this, the proposed scheme design includes additional tree and hedge planting, the creation of ponds and seeding with wildflower seed-mix, and seeding for winter birds. The scheme will also include the installation of bird and bat boxes across the site. All of these measures have been captured in the Biodiversity Net gain score, which is positive.

### **68. Contract Award for the Children and Young Peoples Therapies Service (EX4181)**

*(Paragraph 3 - information relating to financial/business affairs of particular person)*

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The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 14), seeking authority to enter into an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) to work in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council (Lead Authority) & Brighter Futures For Children Ltd (Reading) to deliver the Children and Young People's Integrated Therapies Service.

**RESOLVED that:** the recommendations in the exempt report be agreed.

**Other options considered:**

- Undertake full tender for West Berkshire Council only. This option was considered and discounted as partnering with neighbouring authorities will achieve economies of scale and better value for money.
- Do nothing and let the current contract lapse with no future provision. This is not an option due to the statutory nature of the service.
- Provide the service in-house. The Council do not have the necessary skills to deliver this service and it is not considered economically viable to pursue this option.

*(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 6.40 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....