

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 JULY 2021

Councillors Present: Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Graham Bridgman, Hilary Cole, Lynne Doherty, Ross Mackinnon and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Susan Halliwell (Executive Director - Place), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Andy Sharp (Executive Director (People)), Jake Thurman (Group Executive (Cons)), Councillor Adrian Abbs, Councillor Phil Barnett, Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Councillor Carolyn Culver, Councillor Lee Dillon, Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Steve Masters, Councillor Erik Pattenden and Councillor Martha Vickers

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Richard Somner and Councillor Joanne Stewart

PART I

12. Minutes

It was noted that this was the last Executive meeting of Nick Carter, the Chief Executive, before his retirement. Councillor Lynne Doherty took the opportunity to thank Nick for all his hard work and service to the Council over many years, which was much appreciated.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2021 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

Councillor Doherty pointed out that the action on page ten of the minutes (to contact schools with regards to the tuition programme) had been completed.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

14. Public Questions

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

- (a) The question submitted by John Gotelee on the subject of planning permission for residential units on Faraday Road would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (b) The question submitted by Jackie Paynter on the subject of the 11-storey block of flats proposed for the New Eagle Quarter would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (c) The question submitted by Ian Hall on the subject of the provisional cost of construction and the acquiring of land for the new sports ground/football pitch would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (d) The question submitted by Paul Morgan on the subject of who the security contractor was and what services they were providing at Faraday Road would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.

EXECUTIVE - 15 JULY 2021 - MINUTES

- (e) The question submitted by Alan Pearce on the subject of planning permission expiration on the Faraday Plaza site on the London Road Industrial Estate would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (f) The question submitted by Jackie Paynter on the subject of Climate Emergency and whether the wildflower verge project would be rolled out to more places next year to encourage bio diversity was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste.
- (g) The question submitted by Ian Hall on the subject of the Council's awareness of their requirement to balance its desire to be property developers and its legal obligations in areas such as planning, flood relief or sports fields provision would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (h) The question submitted by Paul Morgan on the subject of whether there is a link where members of the public can view what tenders above £10,000 or more was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.
- (i) The question submitted by Ian Hall on the subject of what measures were in place to ensure that the Council's role as property developers was balanced by an impartial decision making process would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- (j) The question submitted by Ian Hall on the income generated and on the sporting activities that have taken place on the site since the closure of the football ground would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.

15. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

16. Financial Year 2020/21 Annual Treasury Outturn (EX4099)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 5) proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon which provided an overview of the treasury management activity for the financial year 2020/21.

Councillor Mackinnon explained that the Treasury function was responsible for the daily cash flow management of the Council. He stated that the Council's excess cash balances fluctuated throughout the year due to various factors and that investment decisions and the desire to maximise interest income was counterbalanced by the need to ensure adequate liquidity and cash flow to meet expected and unexpected cash outflows.

Councillor Mackinnon further stated that the other side of treasury management's work was managing the Council's borrowings and that the work of treasury management impacted the budget in two ways: generating income from the Council's excess cash balances and managing the interest in capital repayments on the Council's borrowings.

With such low risk comes low return and rates were lower than last year, they were also lower by comparable amounts; therefore, the Council had more borrowing than cash investments and the fallen rates were considered a net benefit to the revenue budget overall. Borrowing was £9 million lower at the year-end compared to March 2020; which further demonstrated the sustainability improvements of the Council's Financial Strategy.

A question followed on net borrowing levels and whether this was due to delays to capital projects as a result of Covid-19. Councillor Mackinnon explained that there were indeed delays to projects as a result of Covid-19 and as a result of cash income received from Government in the form of Covid support.

EXECUTIVE - 15 JULY 2021 - MINUTES

A question was then asked on whether the Council should have assets in their portfolio, such as a petrol station, that was not felt to accord with the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. It was clarified that the petrol station was purely a commercial investment. This very point was considered at the time of the investment and the decision was based on the fact that, in future, it would be possible to charge electric vehicles as former petrol stations. Such investments would continue to achieve a financial return.

RESOLVED that the 2020/21 Annual Treasury Outturn be noted.

17. **Environment Strategy Delivery Plan (EX4053)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) proposed by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter. The report sought approval of the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan and agreement of the process for monitoring, updating and reporting the progress in relation to the Delivery Plan.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter stated that the plan itself would not deliver the key goal of carbon neutrality for the district automatically because the Council only represented a small proportion of the District's overall carbon footprint. However, the Council had a duty and they were in a position of leadership to set an example for residents, businesses and groups within the District.

Furthermore, there was an intention of transparency and openness over the coming years and the plan would be published on the Council website provided it was approved tonight and would be updated every month and every year including a high-level summary which would be presented to the Executive showing progress against a number of targets for the achievement of Carbon Neutrality. Targets were challenging and all possible efforts would be given to achieving them.

The high level of engagement was praised and recognition was given to Jenny Graham and her team for all their hard work.

Further comments were given in relation to the public environment alongside the plan and how, for example in the consideration of hedgerow overgrowth and the dangers of pedestrians needing to walk in the streets due to lack of pathway space, it was important for the Council to recognise that in the delivery of this plan it must also take into account the safety of its residents.

A suggestion was made of liaising with larger landowners, who were doing much for local wildlife, perhaps through a forum, to keep them informed and involved in creating a working synergy. It was confirmed that this engagement would happen.

Concerns over unclear timescales were raised and assurances were given that focus was being given to both precise and deliverable outcomes.

There were also comments given around some of the wording in the report and that a 'high standard' should not be the aim but rather a 'net zero' or 'carbon positive' should be the goal. There was also a suggestion of the creation of a simple measure such as a thermometer which would be updated quarterly to show progress on hitting the targets, as this would quantify the carbon footprint. Concern was also raised around actions in the plan having not been started yet, some of which would be short term gains. In response, it was agreed that the wording in the report would be updated to reflect some of the concerns and other suggestions would be looked into further including simplifying the message of carbon neutrality. The difficulty with a thermometer was in assessing the carbon footprint on a district wide basis.

Questions were asked around whether the addition of electrical charging points would be in dedicated bays rather than outside people's homes and regarding active travel

EXECUTIVE - 15 JULY 2021 - MINUTES

promotion, whether there would be money in future budgets to advance those plans. In response, Councillor Ardagh-Walter advised that as demands increased for residential charging points there then would be a scheme put into place that enabled access to all those who required charging points. This would be strong consideration in terms of future budget setting.

RESOLVED that the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan, as included in Appendix C, be approved as a first version of the Plan and that the proposed process for monitoring, updating and reporting on the progress of the Plan be agreed as detailed in section 5 of the report.

18. **Timelord 2 Final Report (EX4011)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 8) proposed by Councillor Howard Woollaston which outlined how the Council intended to hold onto the new ways of working, introduced since March 2020, which enabled more Council services to be available digitally. In addition, there was a desire to address some of the challenges that had been presented. This final draft of the report had been developed following an extensive period of staff consultation earlier in the year. Consultation was ongoing.

Councillor Woollaston stated further that home working, which had increased since March 2020, could work efficiently but was more appropriate for some roles than others and that there would be a need to retain a corporate team working culture that included the mentoring of junior staff and the induction of new recruits. No staff member would be forced to work from home and would be free to work in the office if they chose to; however, it was anticipated that most staff would likely choose to work on a mixed basis.

Councillor Woollaston further maintained that the new way of working provided staff with a better work life balance and would allow for a reduction in office space that would make the Council more environmentally friendly by having reduced travel to work time. There would be a cost implication of revamping the building but those costs would be further offset by savings which would be derived from property disposals.

A number of questions and concerns were raised around the decisions and timescales, and whether plans should wait for the arrival of the new Chief Executive before being implemented. There was also concern that the document contained no reference or focus on the impact this could have on services to residents, and a greater focus was felt to be needed in that aspect.

The response indicated that waiting for the new Chief Executive was not necessary as it was a gradual process and that he would have input. It was agreed that the report required more work on continued focus on residents.

Further concern was raised over the lack of dedicated home office space and therefore a lack of guarantee of privacy for sensitive data. Other concerns were voiced over ensuring hours were covered due to flexibility within the new ways of working model, and therefore could residents contact the necessary officers during core office hours. Other questions were posed around practical coordination of new staff and ensuring there was enough space for everyone if it were decided that staff should be in the office more and Market Street was the only Council building remaining.

It was acknowledged and recognised that these were areas to work on further in varying degrees and would be part of the next process. This included work on office space. Councillor Woollaston explained that West Street House and West Point would not be disposed of until the effectiveness of the new proposals (subject to approval) had been reviewed.

EXECUTIVE - 15 JULY 2021 - MINUTES

It was also recognised that there was mandatory training around data protection and that these systems had been tested due to home working during Covid.

Concerns were also raised over how increased home working could negatively impact the town of Newbury due to less workers travelling to work would result in less footfall and trade; less time required in the office could also mean less local people would be employed and residents would be paying wages to other District's residents. The response suggested that further consultation with staff would help to form a better idea of the impacts and would allow for more planning.

A question was raised as to how this would affect the employment contracts of Council workers. In response, it was stated in the legal implications that no changes were proposed to existing terms and conditions of employment.

It was summarised that the Council did need to take a leadership role and be proactive on this and that what was needed was a hybrid model that was balanced and proactive with staff flexibility and certainty for staff. The Library Service was a positive example of how this could work for residents. Town centres were changing pre - Covid and there was not a perfect solution, but high streets were changing and that was why there was the masterplan for that.

RESOLVED that:

- The Timelord 2 working model be approved as set out in the covering report.
- An ongoing allocation of funding from within existing budgets for a staff home working allowance totalling £150,000 per annum be approved.
- £50,000 of costs, from within existing budgets, be approved to fund the ongoing additional costs of the internal booking system, staff development and support costs in respect of Timelord 2 and a doubling of the Reasonable Adjustments Budget.
- The sum of £691,130 to be borrowed to fund the capital works required to support the goals of Timelord 2 be approved.
- The effectiveness of the new proposals would be reviewed six months after the Timelord 2 Programme had been implemented.
- Once this review has been completed, to approve the disposal of the West Street House and West Point buildings if appropriate.

19. West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership (EX4107)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 9) proposed by Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter that sought to gain approval for West Berkshire Council to help create and enter into a Water Safety Partnership for West Berkshire with Emergency Service organisations and the Canal and River Trust.

Councillor Ardagh-Walter discussed how Officers had come together with the Canal and River Trust and Emergency Services after tragedy had struck with the drowning of a toddler in the canal. The Partnership would focus on communicating and highlighting the risks to residents around water safety and promotion of public awareness to share best practice both within the area and more widely across the country. This approach of a cross-agency partnership had been shown to work successfully in other parts of the country and was detailed in paragraph 5.7. At this stage the report was seeking approval for West Berkshire Council to be a lead member of the partnership and more details would be developed over the coming months.

Comments made were fully in support of the formation of the body. It was noted that the Terms of Reference would be worked on.

EXECUTIVE - 15 JULY 2021 - MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Council's participation as a leading member organisation of the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership be approved.

20. Members' Questions

(Ahead of Member question (c), Councillor Lee Dillon declared a personal interest by virtue of the fact that his father was a major shareholder in a public house within West Berkshire. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial he was permitted to take part in the debate).

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

- a) The question submitted by Councillor Phil Barnett on the subject of identifying if the GATSO cameras would be updated or replaced would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.
- b) The question submitted by Councillor Martha Vickers on the subject of the Children's Commissioner's fourth annual report on the state of Children's mental health services in England 2020/21 was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education.
- c) The question submitted by Councillor Lee Dillon on the subject of the relaxation of noise pollution in light of Covid restrictions was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation.
- d) The question submitted by Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of how many residential properties West Berkshire Council owned was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development.
- e) The question submitted by Councillor Steve Masters on the subject of how many people were in West Berkshire Council owned properties on an emergency basis was answered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation
- f) The question submitted by Councillor Jeremy Cottam on the subject of whether the resurfacing of Floral Way would include mitigation of the road noise would receive a written response from the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 6.55pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature