

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY, 9 MAY 2024

Councillors Present: Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Nick Carter, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Carlyne Culver, Paul Dick, Lee Dillon, Billy Drummond (Chairman), Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander, Jane Langford, Ross Mackinnon, David Marsh, Biyi Oloko, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Matt Shakespeare, Richard Somner, Stephanie Steevenson, Joanne Stewart, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Tony Vickers (Vice-Chairman) and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children and Family Services), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Sarah Clarke (Service Director (Strategy and Governance)), Martin Dunscombe (Communications Manager), Councillor Alan Macro (Via Zoom), Honorary Alderman Adrian Edwards, Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, Honorary Alderman Gordon Lundie, Honorary Alderman Graham Pask, Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles, Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive (Cons)) and Benjamin Ryan (Democratic Services Officer)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeremy Cottam (following Agenda Item 5), Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Janine Lewis, Councillor Geoff Mayes, Councillor Erik Pattenden, Councillor Martha Vickers, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Keith Chopping, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones, Honorary Alderman Mollie Lock, and Honorary Alderman Alan Law

PART I

98. Chairman's Remarks

Councillor Jeremy Cottam expressed gratitude for a successful year, thanking Members for their respect and support. He commended the efforts of West Berkshire Council staff, noting his visits to various departments, resource centres, libraries and care homes in the lead up to Christmas and at other times of the year. He praised the community's participation in activity across the district, highlighting the RAF Welford memorial service.

Councillor Cottam highlighted events he had attended, these included events held by:

- Time to Talk: which provided mental health support for children and young adults up to the age of 21.
- Eight Bells: mental health charity primarily serving Newbury.
- Daisy's Dream: which provided a crucial role in supporting children in bereavement.

Councillor Cottam expressed deep gratitude to his wife, Mrs Lourdes Cottam, for her unwavering support throughout the year. He extended thanks to Ms Melanie Booth, who stepped in during a critical time and provided valuable assistance for the first few months of his tenure. He also congratulated Mr Ben Ryan for his hard work and transition into the new position of support officer.

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99. Presentations

The Chairman made a presentation to Mrs Cottam as a thank you for her support over the past year.

100. Election of the Chairman for the Municipal Year 2024/2025

The Chairman asked for nominations for the position of Chairman of the Council. Councillor Martin Colston nominated Councillor Billy Drummond for the position of Chairman. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Phil Barnett. There were no further nominations for the position.

Councillor Colston, spoke in support of Councillor Drummond and highlighted his 21 years of service at West Berkshire Council (The Council), 24 years on Greenham Parish Council, and 5 years on Newbury Town Council. Councillor Colston complimented Councillor Drummond's dedication, including his resilience as a stroke survivor and his positive impact on the community. He recalled working closely with Councillor Drummond when he was Mayor of Newbury, noting his tireless work for his residents and his involvement in many outside bodies. He praised him as a role model for stroke survivors and expressed confidence in his ability to bring warmth and enthusiasm to the role of Chairman, lighting up official visits with his beaming smile.

Councillor Phil Barnett noted Councillor Drummond's tireless work for residents and his preference for face-to-face interactions with officers. The Councillor detailed Councillor Drummond's habit of working 365 days a year and expressed certainty that his commitment to the position of Chairman would be 100%.

RESOLVED that Councillor Billy Drummond be elected as Chairman of Council for the Municipal Year 2024/2025.

Councillor Drummond (The Chairman) read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Chairman thanked all Members for their support and Councillors Colston and Barnett for their kind words. The Chairman emphasised the honour and responsibility of the role, committing to fairness in all meetings and to promote West Berkshire as a great place to live, work, and enjoy life. He acknowledged the trust placed in him and promised to represent the Council with dedication and enthusiasm.

The Chairman expressed gratitude to Councillor Cottam for his outstanding service as Chairman of the Council and acknowledged Councillor Cottam's dedication and support, highlighting his busy schedule, as well as the honour of working alongside him. The Chairman wished Councillor Cottam the best of luck in his future endeavours.

101. Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2024/2025

The Chairman nominated Councillor Tony Vickers for the position of Vice-Chairman. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Colston.

There were no further nominations for the position.

The Chairman spoke in support of Councillor Vickers, highlighting his extensive experience and dedication to the community. He shared that Councillor Vickers moved to West Berkshire in 1980 and had been an active member of the Liberal Party since 1964. The Chairman noted Councillor Vickers military background and his political career. The Chairman detailed Councillor Vickers professional background, noting his involvement in land value taxation research and his role as CEO of a small charity. Councillor Vickers previous tenure as Vice-Chairman in 2004-2005 was highlighted, along with his consistent presence on planning committees. His academic contributions as a part-time

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lecturer and researcher at Kingston University's School of Surveying and Planning were also mentioned.

Councillor Colston, expressed similar sentiments, emphasising Councillor Vickers dedication to public service and his knack for inspiring others. He mentioned first meeting Councillor Vickers when he was Chairman of the local Liberal Democrat Party in 2017 and quickly becoming involved in local politics under his mentorship. He praised the Councillor's tireless efforts to improve the community and his ability to engage others in civic activities.

RESOLVED that Councillor Vickers be elected as Vice-Chairman of Council for the Municipal Year 2024/2025.

The Vice-Chairman read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

Councillor Vickers expressed his gratitude to the Members for their support. He thanked the Chairman and Councillor Colston for their kind words. He remarked on the significance of waiting 20 years to resume the role of Vice-Chairman, reflecting on his previous tenure in 2004-2005 before the party lost control to the Conservatives. He acknowledged the honour of being elected and promised to support the Chairman diligently, emphasising the importance of the role as a civic leader in West Berkshire, a community he had been part of for more than half his life. He concluded by thanking Members for their trust and pledged to fulfil his duties to the best of his ability.

(Councillor Cottam left the meeting at 19:32 pm).

102. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following point of clarification:

Capital Strategy Financial Years 2024 to 2034 – Councillor Denise Gaines gave clarification on the pothole reporting figures provided. The 1881 potholes reported in January and February 2024 was ten times the amount reported for the same period in 2022 and not 2023. She added that the 2024 figures were double those reported in 2023.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

103. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

104. Election of the Strong Leader of the Council

Councillor Lee Dillon nominated Councillor Jeff Brooks for the position. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines.

There were no further nominations.

Councillor Dillon congratulated the newly elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman and thanked officers and colleagues for their support during his tenure as Leader. He highlighted Councillor Brooks' extensive experience, including his roles as the last Leader of Berkshire County Council, Leader of the Opposition, and Deputy Leader. Councillor Brooks was credited with driving the Council's Strategy and making the Council more customer focused. Councillor Dillon praised Councillor Brooks' dedication, political support, and pastoral care, wishing him success in his new role.

Councillor Gaines described Councillor Brooks as a dedicated and experienced politician. She highlighted the Councillor's tenacity, resilience, and ability to get things done,

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emphasising his suitability for the leadership role given the financial challenges and resource limitations being faced by the Council.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon congratulated the newly elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman and extended his congratulations to Councillor Brooks. He acknowledged the long apprenticeship Councillor Brooks had served as Leader of the Opposition and was relieved that the Council had clarity on leadership. He emphasised that the role of the Opposition was to keep the Administration 'on its toes' and wished the new Leader success, while expressing hope that the Administration would prioritise services for residents over national political debates. Councillor Mackinnon concluded by urging the Administration to work diligently and effectively for the benefit of residents, expressing his hope that the Council would see positive changes under the new leadership.

Councillor David Marsh added his congratulations on behalf of the Minority Group to the newly elected Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and to Councillor Brooks. He noted that the Green Party did not support the concept of a Strong Leader of the Council, preferring a more democratic committee system. However, he acknowledged Councillor Brooks' performance in the acting role, particularly praising him for his involvement in improving processes relating to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Adrian Abbs highlighted his positive interactions with Councillor Brooks and expressed confidence in his leadership. He mentioned the importance of open-mindedness and collaboration, hoping that the new Leader would be receptive to proposals and input from all Members.

RESOLVED that Councillor Jeff Brooks be elected as Strong Leader of the Council.

105. Appointment of the Executive by the Leader of the Council for the 2024/2025 Municipal Year

Councillor Jeff Brooks began his address by expressing his gratitude for being appointed as Leader. He emphasised that a Strong Leader was only as effective as the team behind them. He thanked the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, praising their dedication as he looked forward to working with them. The Councillor recalled his past experiences in leadership roles and the challenges faced, highlighting the importance of teamwork and resilience. He reflected on the financial challenges the Council faced, noting that the Administration needed to achieve significant savings in a shorter period compared to previous years. Despite these challenges, he emphasised the achievements of the Council in delivering on various Manifesto commitments, such as:

- Neighbourhood letters for planning applications;
- Community Forums;
- Addressing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) issue;
- Training sessions for Newbury Football Club at Faraday Road;
- Reduction of temporary workers to achieve cost savings;
- An Opposition Member chairing Scrutiny;
- Delivery of 275 affordable homes;
- Public involvement in the Environment Advisory Groups;
- Off-street electric vehicle (EV) charging contracts;
- Foster care recruitment programmes.

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The Councillor acknowledged the hard work of officers under difficult circumstances and emphasised the need for cultural changes within the Council to improve service delivery.

Councillor Brooks, Leader of the Council (and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications), announced the appointment of Members to the Executive for 2024/2025 as follows:

Councillor Denise Gaines – Deputy Leader of Council & Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing

Councillor Iain Cottingham - Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources

Councillor Louise Sturgess - Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration

Councillor Patrick Clark - Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Councillor Heather Codling - Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services

Councillor Nigel Foot - Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport, and Countryside

Councillor Stuart Gourley - Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways

Councillor Vicky Poole - Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme

Councillor Lee Dillon - Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement

106. **Appointment of and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2024/25 Municipal Year**

The Council considered the report (Agenda Item 10) regarding the appointment and allocation of seats for the next Municipal Year in accordance with the duty under section 15 of the Local Government Housing Act 1989, to ensure that this reflected the latest political make-up of the Council which was an annual consideration.

The report sought agreement of the Council's Policy Framework for 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 5.22 of the report, reflective of the Policies reserved for Full Council.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines.

- "That Council notes that under paragraph 8 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, notice has been received that the Members set out in paragraph 5.1 are to be regarded as Members of the Liberal Democrat Group, Conservative Group and Minority Opposition Group respectively.
- That the Council agrees to the appointment of the various Committees and to the number of places on each as set out in Table A, at paragraph 5.4.
- That the Council agrees to the allocation of seats to the Political Groups in accordance with section 15(5) of the Local Government Act 1989 as set out in Table B at paragraph 5.14 of the report.
- That the number of substitutes on each of the Committees and Commissions be as set out in Table C, at paragraph 5.17.
- In respect of the District and Area Planning Committees, the substitute Members are all drawn from Members representing wards within the Committee's area who are not appointed to the Committee. Where substitutes attend the District Planning meeting, they need to be drawn from the same Area Planning meeting as the Member they are substituting for.

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- That the Council approves the appointment of Members to the Committees as set out in Appendix A and the appointments to Task Groups and Panels set out in Appendix B which are in accordance with the wishes of the Political Groups. Council notes the Membership of the bodies set out in Appendix C.
- That the Council, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as amended, agrees that the Council's Policy Framework for 2024/25 be as set out in paragraph 5.22 of this report, and that any necessary amendments be made to the Council's Constitution.
- That the Council notes that other plans, policies and strategies requiring approval which are not included in the approved Policy Framework and which are not otherwise reserved by law to Council, will be the responsibility of the Council's Executive in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.
- That the Council notes that Paragraph 6.2 of Article 6 of the Constitution will be amended to reflect any changes made to the Executive by the Leader of the Council at the Annual Council meeting.
- That the appointment of two non-voting co-opted Parish/Town Councillors be made to the Governance Committee as detailed in Appendix A.
- To re-appoint three Independent Persons (standards) namely Lindsey Appleton, Mike Wall and Alan Penrith, and to appoint Simon Carey as an Independent Person (Audit) to focus on the risk and audit functions of the Governance Committee.
- To note the membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board as set out in Appendix C.
- That authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make any changes required to the Constitution as a result of the changes to the number of Members of the Council and following the appointments to Committees.
- Council is asked to note the Council Bodies Rules as detailed at Part 6 of the Constitution, that are available via the link at Appendix E".

Councillor Brooks made the following changes and clarifications to the proposed appointments:

- Environment Advisory Group: Councillor Vicky Poole would step down as a substitute. Councillor Geoff Mayes would take her place.
- Corporate Parenting Panel: Councillor Justin Pemberton would replace Councillor Billy Drummond, and the substitute would be Councillor Martha Vickers.
- The Safer Streets Champion: Councillor Stephanie Steevenson would replace Councillor Vicky Poole.
- District Planning Committee: Councillor Denise Gaines to replace Councillor Martin Colston.

Councillor Brooks discussed the roles of Member Champions, expressing the need for these roles to be formalised within the Council's Constitution. He praised the work of current Champions, such as Councillor Steevenson (Armed Forces Champion) and Councillor Martha Vickers (Green Champion), but highlighted the lack of job descriptions, terms of reference, and support for these roles. He proposed that these roles should be enshrined in the Constitution, with clear expectations and annual reports on their achievements.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed an amendment:

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- District Planning Committee: Councillor Dennis Benneyworth would step down as a Member, Councillor Howard Woollaston would become a full Member instead of being a substitute, and Councillor Paul Dick would be a substitute.

Councillor Marsh proposed an amendment:

- Member Development Group: Councillor Clive Taylor to be added.
- Standing Advisory Commission for Religious Education: Councillor Taylor to be added.
- Corporate Parenting Panel: Councillor Marsh to be added.

Councillor Marsh expressed support for the new Executive team and the proposal to formalise the Champion roles.

A point of order was raised by Councillor Howard Woollaston regarding the allocation of seats, specifically questioning the proportionate split between the Administration, main opposition and minority parties. The Monitoring Officer explained that the allocations were determined by a sequential test and detailed in the body of the report, ensuring they were in accordance with the approved principles.

Councillor Brooks proposed approval of the recommendations including the amendments proposed to the Committees and this was seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines.

The Motion was put to vote, and Council **RESOLVED** to adopt the recommendations including the amendments tabled to the Committees and Safer Streets Champion.

107. Membership of Outside Bodies

The Council considered the report (Agenda Item 11) which sought approval of the annual nominations to the following Outside Bodies:

- Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel
- Local Government Association General Assembly

MOTION proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines.

“That the Council

Approve the appointments for the Municipal Year 2024/25, in accordance with Appendix A, of Member representatives to the following outside bodies:

- Royal Berkshire Fire Authority – Councillors Jeff Brooks, Billy Drummond, Owen Jeffrey and Dennis Benneyworth.
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel – Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, with Councillor Jeremy Cottam the alternate Member.

Council was also asked to note the appointment of Member representatives to the Local Government Association General Assembly - Councillors Jeff Brooks, Lee Dillon, Denise Gaines and Ross Mackinnon”.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

108. Member Development Programme 2024/2025

The Council considered the report (Agenda Item 12) which sought adoption of the Member Development Programme for 2024/2025.

Motion: proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Vicky Poole.

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“That the Council

Agree the proposed Member Development Programme for 2024/25.

Authorise the Service Director – Strategy and Governance to regularly review and amend the Programme where necessary throughout the Municipal Year to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose”.

Councillor Brooks emphasised the importance of continuous training and development for Members, suggesting the inclusion of digital and on-demand training methods. He stressed the need for flexible and accessible training options.

Councillor Joanne Stewart raised a concern about the upcoming Scrutiny of Adult Social Care session, noting the short notice.

Councillor Adrian Abbs supported the transformation program, advocating for digital training resources that could be accessed as needed, particularly in the event of a by-election.

Councillor Biyi Oloko congratulated the newly appointed Members and raised a concern that the date for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion session was to be confirmed. He sought assurance that it would be scheduled promptly.

Councillor Carlyne Culver responded to the point raised on the Scrutiny of Adult Social Care training, she committed to recording the session for those unable to attend and addressing any concerns Members might have in advance.

Councillor Poole praised the comprehensive nature of last year's Member Development Programme and expressed eagerness to work with the Member Development Group.

Councillor Brooks thanked Members for their contributions and reiterated the importance of ongoing review and adaptation of the training programme to ensure it remained effective and relevant.

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

109. Licensing Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Licensing Committee had not met.

110. Personnel Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Personnel Committee had not met.

111. Governance Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Governance Committee had met on 16 April 2024.

112. District Planning Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the District Planning Committee had not met.

113. Scrutiny Commission

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Scrutiny Commission had met on 25 April 2024.

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114. Health Scrutiny Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Health Scrutiny Committee had not met.

115. Health and Wellbeing Board

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Health and Wellbeing Board had met on 2 May 2024.

116. Joint Public Protection Committee

The Council noted that, since its last ordinary meeting, the Joint Public Protection Committee had not met.

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 8:10 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature