

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19 SEPTEMBER 2024

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Iain Cottingham, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines (Vice-Chairman), Stuart Gourley, Justin Pemberton, Louise Sturgess and Vicky Poole

Also Present: ,

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:

Councillor(s) Absent:

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Public Questions

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

4. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

5. Financial Year 2024/25 Quarter One Capital Financing Performance Report (EX4513)

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 6), which presented the provisional outturn position for financial year 2024/25 against the approved capital programme and financing implications for financial year 2025/26.

Councillor Cottingham noted that the predicted expenditure of £62.1 million was unlikely to occur due to resourcing pressures.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report and commented that Members were not preventing officers from recruiting staff, but it was a challenge to attract the correct people.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried whether resourcing had been considered when approving the Capital programme in March 2024. Councillor Cottingham reported that it had and noted that certain skills had become harder to recruit.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that with a £4 million underspend, work should be accelerated at Falkland School. Councillor Heather Codling responded that the programme was being accelerated and should be completed by September 2026.

Councillor Mackinnon queried whether a railing at his local primary school could be moved to protect the children. Councillor Brooks agreed that an officer from small works would contact him in relation to the matter.

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Councillor Adrian Abbs requested further information relating to the Dryside works at Northcroft Leisure Centre. Councillor Nigel Foot explained that the works related to an internal refurbishment and re-organisation within the existing footprint of the building managed by Everyone Active. It was noted that the squash courts would be removed but that alternative courts were available at Kennet Leisure Centre.

Councillor Howard Woollaston queried how money borrowed from the PWLB was being spent. Joseph Holmes, Executive Director for Resources, reported that the Council had an underlying borrowing need which had led to short-term borrowing due to high interest rates, however it was likely that substantial borrowing would be undertaken in future years to fund the capital programme, and capital schemes that had taken place. Councillor Cottingham noted that the Council's cash requirements were greater than the profit and loss accounting, and consequently there were cash requirements in excess of accruals from an accounting perspective.

RESOLVED that: Executive note

- The forecast outturn position of planned expenditure of £62.1 million, generating a £4.1 million underspend. During the course of the financial year it is not unusual for forecast expenditure to be reduced, resulting in a requirement for reprofiling. Capital programme reprofiling occurs for a number of reasons, delays with projects through third party contractors, economic conditions and reprioritisation due to unforeseen events. No capital expenditure is financed until it is incurred, protecting the capital financing budget which is funded through the revenue budget.

Executive approve:

- The proposed reprofiling of planned expenditure from 2024/25 into 2025/26 of £7.6 million, detailed by service in appendix A.
- The proposed transfer of Council funded expenditure budget totalling £2.8 million from 2025/26 into 2024/26 for support of the Northcroft Dry side Development Project.
- The proposed transfer of £801k of external funding from 2023/24 into 2024/25 to support delivery of the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan project.

6. **2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One (EX4516)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 7), which reported on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets for Quarter One for the 2024/25 financial year. It was noted that the Council continued to face severe financial pressure on its general fund and had the lowest level of reserves in the country. Councillor Cottingham reported that there had been significant overspend pressures during Quarter One in Adult Social Care, Education and Children's Services.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that in the first two years of the Liberal Democrat administration there had been a savings requirement of £23 million, which was the same amount that the previous administration had been required to save over five years.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that an overspend of £5.5 million after just one quarter was unforgivable and queried what mitigation was being undertaken. Councillor Cottingham commented that accounting mitigations that would be undertaken in relation to accruals, and that it was within the Administration's control to achieve a balanced budget.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to the Home to School Transport overspend and queried how much was due to extra demand and how much to inflation. Councillor Heather Codling responded that demand had increased from 486 pupils, to 517. It was reported that costs had increased, and recruitment of drivers had been difficult, but that mitigations were being investigated including alternative routes and walking routes.

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Councillor Mackinnon queried whether Councillor Cottingham would agree that overspends in Home to School Transport and Disability Support had very little to do with the reserves position at the start of the year. It was reported that the unit cost for delivery for home to school transport had increased, as had the number of children requiring the service. Councillor Cottingham commented that there was sufficient resilience within the plan to ensure that the extra pressures that had arisen could be absorbed.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to Appendix B and in particular section 1.1 which stated mitigations of £920,000 but the table below displayed mitigations of £1 million. It was queried why there was a discrepancy. Councillor Mackinnon further expressed unease with the use of further accounting mitigations. Councillor Cottingham acknowledged that there was an error in the narrative and that the figure was £1 million. He further advised that any accrual would be validated by the Council's external auditors.

RESOLVED that: Executive note

- The forecast Quarter One position of £5.5m overspend against a net revenue budget of £164.6 million and, if the Council outturns at the forecast position, the General Fund of £0.4m.
- The key areas of pressure relating to demand led services driving the forecast overspend position detailed in section 5.6 of this report.
- The work and mitigations underway totalling £3.5m which, if achieved, would reduce the forecast overspend to £2m, and would lead to a General Fund surplus of £3.9m. Further mitigations are in progress which will be factored into the Quarter Two reporting.

7. **Draft Waste Management Strategy (EX4406)**

Councillor Stuart Gourley introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which sought approval to publish the draft Waste Management Strategy for public consultation.

Councillor Adrian Abbs suggested that it was a one focus strategy and that it would have been useful to investigate separating waste at recycling centres rather than by residents. Councillor Gourley commented that there was greater contamination with co-mingling recycling, and that it was important to encourage recycling the correct way. He further commented that no further bins would be introduced under the proposals.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried whether it was the Administration's preferred option to change black bin collection from fortnightly to three weekly. Councillor Gourley responded that it was the best practicable environmental option and that if recycling at kerbside was encouraged there would be capacity within the black bins to make the change. Councillor Mackinnon suggested that Councillor Gourley had not answered the question as to the preferred frequency.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to page 22 of the Strategy and queried what 'significant efforts' had been made to phase out the garden waste charge. Councillor Brooks commented that given the budgetary pressures faced by the Council there had been significant efforts to reduce the charge.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to the section again and queried whether 2025 was the date that the charge would be free to all households. Councillor Gourley clarified that the date referred to the 2025-26 budgeting process and agreed to amend the date to avoid confusion.

Councillor Howard Woollaston referred to a previous employment which had involved recycling and reported that experts at the time had advised that co-mingling was a more efficient way to get things done and queried whether the Council was adopting the correct system. Councillor Gourley responded that evidence suggested that there was

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very little improvement from co-mingling, and further it could mean sending the waste to other countries.

It was clarified that fortnightly recycling would be retained if the three weekly black bin collection was implemented. Routing options would be reviewed to ensure the most efficient use of vehicles and operatives involved.

Councillor Justin Pemberton seconded the recommendations within the report and referred to the contributions that town and parish councils could make towards supporting the Strategy.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Approved that the draft waste management strategy is published for public consultation on 23 September 2024.

8. **West Berkshire Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27 (EX4546)**

Councillor Patrick Clark introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which proposed approval of the Council's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-27.

Councillor Heather Codling seconded the recommendations within the report.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon thanked Councillor Clark and officers for producing the Strategy and offered his full support.

RESOLVED that: Executive approve the Strategy, as set out in Appendix B.

9. **Carers Strategy (EX4577)**

Councillor Patrick Clark introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9) which outlined the Strategy for supporting carers in the district. Councillor Clark commented that carers needed to know how much they were valued and that the document helped to signpost assistance available to them.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed support for the report.

Councillor Heather Codling seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive adopt the attached strategy.

10. **Briefing Note - Customer Charter Refresh (EX4534)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 11) which detailed a review and refresh of the Customer Charter created in 2022. Councillor Cottingham thanked the opposition for creating the Charter originally and reported that the re-launch would be accompanied with a small, targeted publicity campaign.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that there were a couple of typographical errors within the Customer Charter which would be amended prior to publication. Councillor Brooks expressed a hope to have the Customer Charter printed and displayed throughout all Council buildings.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon approved the document and queried whether any out of hours standards had been added to the Charter. Councillor Brooks commented that the out of hours service was being tested and was working well.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Review the revised documents (Appendices A-C) and provide approval to proceed with the revised version.

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- The revised document will be produced, uploaded on the website, printed copies produced for reception, libraries, museums etc at minimal cost to the council.
- A small, but targeted communications campaign, will be developed to get the refreshed version out to customers on WhatsApp, Let's Chat, other social media channels and relaunched on our website, amongst other options to assist with embedding the new version and how it links with our behaviour and performance management frameworks.

11. **Charitable Sector Memorandum of Understanding (EX4597)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced the report (Agenda Item 12) which provided an update on progress to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Charitable Sector.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed support for the report.

Councillor Louise Sturgess seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- The Draft MOU is noted in principle, subject to wider engagement with the Charitable Sector.
- Wider engagement takes place with the Charitable sector and with WBC internal stakeholders.
- A paper returns to Executive following that wider engagement.

12. **2024/25 Performance Report Quarter One (EX4540)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced a report (Agenda Item 13), which provided assurance that the priority areas in the Council Strategy 2023-2027 were being managed effectively, and where performance had fallen below the expected level, presented information on the remedial action taken and the impact of that action.

Councillor Brooks commented that he wanted the report to be changed dramatically, with a more simplified format and greater mitigation detail for red RAG rated measures.

Councillor Brooks highlighted section 4.8 of the report which outlined recent achievements of the Council, citing continued reduction in agency staff, the launch of the Berkshire Prosperity fund, and the return of Newbury Football Club to Faraday Road in the forthcoming month.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the garden waste charge and suggested that the Administration should abandon the pledge and admit that they had made a mistake. Councillor Brooks responded that the strategy would continue.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that in sixteen months there had been no engagement with rural businesses and queried the reason. Councillor Gourley commented that he had attended the rural business forum the previous November. Councillor Mackinnon commented that the performance portal provided no details of this and requested that it be improved to provide accurate information.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried why EV points were not being monitored in relation to

Councillor Mackinnon queried whether the Administration would abide by the results of the pedestrianisation consultation when completed. Councillor Stuart Gourley commented that it was a pre-trial, pre-experimental consultation, and that the Administration would wait until the feedback was received and analysed.

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In response to a query from Councillor Mackinnon, Councillor Brooks agreed that the measure of responding to public questions within five days needed to improve.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Note the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027, maintaining a strong outcome for many of the measures, and remedial actions taken where performance is below target.
- Note the remedial actions.

13. **Accommodation Review: Proposed Disposal of Unit 1 Turnhams Green Business Park (EX4507)**

Councillor Vicky Poole introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 14) which recommended disposal of the Council's Corporate leasehold property known as Unit 1, Turnhams Green Business Park, Calcot.

Councillor Jeff Brooks clarified that the recommendation would be amended to read that the 'Executive approved' rather than 'Council approved'.

Recommendation (Vote to be taken in Part II):

- For officers to instruct agents to market Turnhams Green.
- To delegate authority to the Executive Director of Resources, in consultation with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Services, and the Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property to consider any offers received in respect of the disposal of Turnhams Green and to accept any such offer considered appropriate subject to compliance with the Council's duty to obtain best consideration.
- To delegate authority to the Service Director- Strategy & Governance in consultation with the Service Director- Finance, Procurement and Property to enter into the appropriate disposal documentation for Turnhams Green including any such amendments that are necessary in line with agreed sales heads of terms.
- That the existing Roger Croft meeting room at Market Street, Newbury, is reconfigured to allow the centralisation of Child Protection Conferences, and retained for Executive use on Thursdays and Fridays.

14. **Members' Questions**

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

15. **Exclusion of Press and Public**

RESOLVED that: members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 3 and 5 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.

16. **Accommodation Review: Proposed Disposal of Unit 1 Turnhams Green Business Park - Confidential Appendix (EX4507)**

(Paragraph 3 – information relating to financial/business affairs of particular person)
(Paragraph 5 – information relating to legal privilege)

The Executive considered a report Agenda Item 17 which related to proposals to dispose of the Council's Corporate leasehold property known as Unit 1, Turnhams Green Business Park, Calcot.

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

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Other options considered: doing nothing could be considered, however this is not recommended given the need to take action to address the Council's financial position and the strategic objective to improve the levels of service given to the Council's customers.

(The meeting commenced at Time Not Specified and closed at 8.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature