

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2024

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

Also Present: ,

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Denise Gaines

Councillor(s) Absent:

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 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

Councillor Phil Barnett presented a petition containing 60 signatures relating to a request to impose a 20mph zone with raised cushions at the eastern end of the new racecourse development. The petition was referred to officers for review.

5. Financial year 2024/25 Quarter Two Capital Financing Performance Report (EX4514)

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

Councillor Cottingham reported a forecast planned expenditure of £60.1m with a proposed reprofiling of £8.1m from 2024/25 to 2025/26. Councillor Cottingham highlighted some key projects including a £1.4m expansion project at the Castle School, £5.4m to redevelop the dry side provision at Northcroft Leisure Centre and £3.9m of carbon reduction and solar initiative projects.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried why the £8.1m had not been spent by the Executive. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Section 151 Officer), responded that the expenditure was being re-profiled due to project delays. Councillor Cottingham noted that there were issues in recruiting project managers.

Councillor Mackinnon queried the level of officer time and internal resource that had been taken up with the Faraday Road project. Councillor Cottingham noted that the project had been a manifesto commitment.

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Councillor Mackinnon referred to section 2.2(b) of the report and queried whether it related to the Faraday Road project. Councillor Cottingham clarified that the figure related to the holistic Playing Pitch action plan. In response to a further query, Councillor Cottingham confirmed that the sum had increased from the March budget due to a reprofiling and re-assessment of the level of investment required for the Playing Pitch Strategy.

In response to a query from Councillor Mackinnon, Councillor Stuart Gourley clarified that of the £0.76m of external funding, £338,000 would be allocated specifically to drainage and flood risk projects.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Members noted

- The forecast outturn position of planned expenditure of £60.1 million against the annual budget of £64.9 million, creating a forecast £4.8 million underspend.

Members approved the following budgetary amendments:

- The proposed reprofiling of planned expenditure from 2024/25 into 2025/26 of £8.1 million, detailed by service in appendix A.
- The proposed transfer of council funded expenditure budget totalling £0.47 million from 2025/26 into 2024/25 for support of the Playing Pitch action plan.
- £2.9 million of external funding relating to the Superfast Broad Band project is allocated and the planned project expenditure is funded accordingly.
- £0.76 million of external funding (s106, CIL and DFT grant), relating to Street lighting improvements, Essential maintenance budgets, Drainage & flood risk projects and Car park improvements is allocated to cover in year expenditure.

6. **2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter Two (EX4517)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced a report (Agenda Item 7), which reported on the Council's revenue budget as at Quarter Two of 2024/25.

Councillor Cottingham noted that actions and mitigations, if achieved, would result in a reduced forecast overspend of £2.1m and a General Fund balance of £3.9m. Councillor Cottingham acknowledged that this level of reserves was the lowest for any local authority in the country, and consequently meant that there continued to be a very tight internal control environment.

Councillor Cottingham warned that if the Council was unable to reduce the overspend there would be a risk that the Council may need to apply to the Government for Exceptional Financial Support.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to the Quarter One report and recalled a cost of £54,000 per child for Home to School Transport and queried why the cost had increased. Councillor Heather Codling noted that the £54,000 referred to Special Educational Needs children, not the average unit cost of getting to school. It was noted that it was a rising cost due to complexity of need and a range of issues, all of which were being reviewed and managed by officers.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to Home to School Transport and perceived inequalities in application in Streatley. Councillor Codling responded that each case depended on distance from school to place of residence. The Leader of the Council commented that there would be no discussion of individual cases and suggested raising the matter with the Portfolio Holder outside the meeting.

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Councillor Mackinnon queried whether transformation funding could be used to bolster the revenue budget. Councillor Cottingham explained that to qualify for transformation funding there were strict criteria for a clear business case of delivery of future ongoing savings, which was being enforced by officers. Councillor Cottingham agreed to allow Councillor Mackinnon site of the policy rationale.

In response to a query from Councillor Howard Woollaston it was confirmed that some of the transformation funding was derived from sale of the property portfolio.

RESOLVED that: Executive noted

- The Quarter Two budget manager forecast of £11.1m overspend (Q1 £9.3m) against a net revenue budget of £164.6 million.
- The actions to reduce the overspend totalling £5m and Service Action Plans containing further mitigations and transformation of £4m, which if achieved would reduce the forecast overspend to £2.1m (Q1 £2.1m) and result in a General Fund balance of £3.9m.
- The key areas of pressure relating to demand led services driving the forecast overspend position detailed in section 5.5 of this report.

7. **Contract for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4583)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks referred to the report (Agenda Item 8), and clarified that the recommendations presented for approval were detailed at section 7.2 (1) and (2) of the report.

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed the report which provided details of forthcoming supply, service and works contract awards that would have a contract value in excess of £2.5m and as such would require approval from Executive during the next quarter.

Recommendation: (Vote to be taken in Part II)

That Executive

- delegate authority to the relevant Service Director in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder, s.151 officer and Monitoring Officer to proceed with award of the forthcoming contract that has been identified in this report for award approval during the next quarter of the financial year.
- delegate authority to the Service Director and Democratic in consultation with the relevant Monitoring Officer to finalise the terms of any agreement as set out in the procurement documents and make any necessary drafting or other amendments (such amendments not to be substantial or material) to the terms of the agreement necessary to produce a final agreement for execution and to enter into that agreement.

8. **Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2023-24 (EX4598)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced a report (Agenda Item 9), which presented the annual report of the West Berkshire Corporate Parenting Panel, detailing the Panel's activities during the 2023–24 period and outlining developments planned for the coming year. It was noted that it was the first annual report produced by the Panel.

Councillor Codling referred to section 4.1 of the report, which emphasised that corporate parenting involved 'promoting the same outcomes any good parent would want for their child', and noted the positive achievements made by the Panel.

Councillor Dominic Boeck praised the report.

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RESOLVED that: the annual report was noted, and supported further awareness raising around corporate parenting duties.

9. **Care Leaver Annual Report 2023-24 (EX4643)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced a report (Agenda Item 10), which presented the first annual report of the Council's work with Care Leavers.

Councillor Dominic Boeck approved the report and expressed particular pleasure in the number of older Care Leavers still in contact with the Council.

RESOLVED that: the annual report was noted, supporting greater awareness of the Council's work with Care Leavers.

10. **Early Response Hub Annual Report 2023-24 (EX4639)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced a report (Agenda Item 11), which presented the annual report of the West Berkshire Early Response Hub (ERH), and detailed activities during the period April 2023–March 24. Councillor Codling noted that there were several different elements of work within ERH, and that each element had a focus on prevention and intervention. Further, it was highlighted that the Council worked in partnership with eighteen other agencies to support the children in need of help and support across the district.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that it was a good report and suggested that it was an area that Members should scrutinise at all times.

RESOLVED that: Executive noted the annual report, and that the oversight for the delivery of service supports decisions regarding the future strategic direction of early help.

11. **Commercial Property disposal - Units 1 and 2 Cleveland Gate Retail Park, Guisborough (EX4635)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced a report (Agenda Item 12), which sought approval for the disposal of the Council owned investment property, Units 1 and 2 Cleveland Gate Retail Park, Guisborough, TS14 7FE in accordance with the Property Investment Strategy.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the response to Councillor Woollaston's earlier question and the fact that proceeds from the sale of properties was allowed to be used to top up the transformation budget. Councillor Mackinnon suggested that it appeared that the commercial property was being sold off to reduce the revenue budget and cautioned that all sale proceeds and future categorisations were accounted for accurately. Councillor Cottingham acknowledged the risk and the need to adhere to the rules but noted the business case that the return investment from the transformation was greater than the interest received from the property portfolio.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to section 4.3 of the report which noted that the Council had 'successfully' disposed of other assets and queried the level of success in terms of proposed sale value against actual sale receipt. Councillor Cottingham referred Councillor Abbs to the Property Investment Board report which would be published later in the financial year and would contain all relevant information.

Recommendation: (Vote to be taken in Part II) Executive delegate authority to:

- the Service Director – Finance, Property & Procurement in consultation with Executive Member for Finance & resources (Risk Management & Procurement) and the Service Director for Strategy & Governance to consider, review and accept any

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appropriate offer made in accordance with this report and in the parameters of the information contained in the Part II appendix to this report and;

- the Service Director (Strategy & Governance) having consulted with the Service Director (Finance, Property & Procurement) to enter into the relevant sale documentation in accordance with agreed sales heads of terms for the disposal of: Units 1 and 2 Cleveland Gate Retail Park, Guisborough TS14 7FE.

12. Risk Management Strategy (EX4547)

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 13), which set out the Council's Risk Management Strategy for the future. Councillor Cottingham highlighted that the report had been updated to reflect changes in best practice, including use of a 5 by 5 matrix rather than 4 by 4.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that two previous peer reviews had highlighted that the Council was too risk averse, hence the change of emphasis within the new Strategy.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon expressed disappointment that the Strategy did not include the Committee of Sponsoring Organisations (COSO) risk management framework but approved the revised Strategy.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: the Executive approve the Risk Management Strategy.

13. 2024/25 Performance Report Quarter Two (EX4541)

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced a report (Agenda Item 14), 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 was looking to improve the report to make it simpler and more accessible, and that it was a work in progress with the hope that the Quarter Three report would be a further improvement.

Councillor Adrian Abbs referred to Appendix A of the report and requested that future versions contain a key to the RAG rating symbols.

Councillor Jo Stewart referred to page 216 of the agenda pack and queried why the measure to 'launch a mentoring programme for children with local businesses' had ceased. Councillor Louise Sturgess commented that the measure had been included within the Liberal Democrat's manifesto, but that discussions since had revealed that something similar was already in place.

Councillor Richard Somner noted that the level of litter and graffiti was measured as 'Good' and thanked all those groups that helped with litter picking throughout the district. He suggested that the report reference the work that they undertook.

Councillor Somner referred to page 241 and 242 of the agenda pack and noted that there were gaps in the data recorded.

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to the priority of tackling the climate and ecological emergency and commented that there was a distinct difference in the availability of EV charging points in Newbury compared to Thatcham. Councillor Boeck suggested that there did not appear to be a target to improve the provision. Councillor Stuart Gourley confirmed that there was a target and noted that it was detailed on page 217 of the Agenda Pack, and that there were specific plans for Thatcham to install EV charging points at the leisure centre and car parks.

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Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to a KPI detailed on page 223 of the agenda pack which committed to 'Agree plans for sports at Faraday Road through working with the local sporting community', and queried how the Executive had identified the groups that it wanted to work with. Councillor Brooks commented that he would allow Councillor Nigel Foot to respond to the query when answering Member questions later in the meeting.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to the level of abuse that he and his colleagues had suffered from Newbury Football Club and asserted that he had a legitimate question as to how the Executive decided to which groups to work with and involve in Council decision making. Councillor Brooks responded that the question would be dealt with later in the meeting.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Note the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027 priorities scheduled for this financial year.
- Review those areas where performance is below target i.e., reporting as 'Red' or 'Amber, and note that the appropriate remedial action is in place.

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 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. **Contract for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4583)**

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

The Executive considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 17), which provided details of forthcoming supply, service and works contract awards that would have a contract value in excess of £2.5m and as such would require approval from Executive during the next quarter.

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

Other options considered: the approval of a consolidated contract award report is considered the most efficient way of meeting the governance requirements of the Constitution; therefore, no alternative proposals are being made

17. **Commercial Property disposal - Units 1 and 2 Cleveland Gate Retail Park, Guisborough (EX635)**

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

The Executive considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 18), which sought approval for the disposal of the Council owned investment property, Units 1 and 2 Cleveland Gate Retail Park, Guisborough, TS14 7FE in accordance with the Property Investment Strategy.

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

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Other options considered: the alternative option would be for the Council to retain ownership of the asset and continue to receive the income from the tenants. This option does not align with the Property Investment Strategy approved by the Executive on 2nd November 2023 (ref EX4402) and would not achieve the capital receipt the Council wishes to achieve

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature