

DRAFT

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

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2024

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

Also Present: Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead - Legal & Democratic), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director - Resources), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive (Conservatives)), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Melanie Booth (Group Executive (Lib Dems)), Darius Zarazel (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Honorary Alderman Anthony Linden, Honorary Alderman Quentin Webb, and Honorary Alderman Anthony Stansfeld

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Iain Cottingham, Councillor Erik Pattenden, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Adrian Abbs, Honorary Alderman Graham Pask, Honorary Alderman Keith Chopping, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderwomen Mollie Lock, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones, and Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles

Councillor(s) Absent: Laura Coyle

PART I

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman reported that he had attended several events since the last ordinary Council meeting. Specifically, he mentioned his attendance at the BBC Radio Berkshire Make a Difference Awards 2024 and welcomed that one of the award winners came from West Berkshire – The HEROS Charity. He encouraged Members to promote the event to other local charities and encourage their entry to the competition.

In addition, he visited Wokingham Town Hall for the Kings Award for Voluntary Service 2024. The Chairman highlighted that out of the 14 groups presented with an award, four were from Newbury – Loose Ends Newbury, Newbury Riding for the Disabled, Newbury Street Pastors, and Swings & Smiles.

2. Minutes

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Billy Drummond and seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

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3. **Declarations of Interest**

All Councillors present declared an Other Registrable Interest in Agenda Item 11, the recommendations of the West Berkshire Independent Remuneration Panel 2024. However, as permitted under Part 13, Appendix 3, Section 4.3(d) of the Constitution, Members may participate and vote on allowances, payments, or indemnities to Councillors, and for this reason, they would continue to participate in the discussion, debate, and vote on the item.

4. **Petitions**

Councillor Glyn Thomas, a representative of Shaw-cum-Donnington Parish Council, presented a petition containing 62 signatures relating to a safer crossing on the Oxford Road by the Castle Pub at Donnington. Councillor Thomas emphasised that the Parish Council were very keen to see a safer pedestrian crossing at this point due to the volume of traffic on the road, that it was used by children walking to local schools, for residents accessing the Donnington Recreation Ground, for work, and for those visiting local pubs and the Donnington Castle. Councillor Thomas also indicated that the data from their Speed Indicator Device nearby showed that an average of 20 per cent of all vehicles exceed the 30 miles per hour limit. Although acknowledging insufficient space for a standard pedestrian crossing, the petition called on the Council to investigate alternative traffic calming measures.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Thomas for presenting the petition and confirmed to the Parish Council that officers would review the petition and confirm within ten working days what action would be taken.

5. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions received.

6. **Members' Questions**

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

7. **Membership of Committees**

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery:

That Council approve the following changes to the membership of Committees:

- That Councillor Martha Vickers be appointed to the Scrutiny Commission in place of Councillor Justin Pemberton
- That Councillor Stephanie Steevenson be appointed to the Health Scrutiny Committee in place of Councillor Justin Pemberton, and that Councillor Alan Macro be appointed as a substitute member
- And that Councillor Nigel Foot be appointed to the District Planning Committee in place of Councillor Martin Colston

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

8. **Motions from Previous Meetings**

Council noted that there were no motions from previous meetings needing updates.

9. **Updates from Committees**

Council noted the meetings that had been held since the last ordinary meeting of Council as laid out in Agenda item 9.

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10. Hampshire Together Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Council considered a report (Agenda item 10) concerning the seeking of approval for the Council to join the Hampshire Together Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Heather Codling:

That Council:

- (a) SUPPORT the proposal for West Berkshire Council to join the existing Hampshire Together Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a mandatory committee to provide independent scrutiny of the 'Hampshire Together – Modernising our Hospitals and Health Services' Programme;
- (b) DELEGATE scrutiny powers in relation to matters set out in (a) above to the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (c) AGREE to the terms of reference for the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix B of the report; and
- (d) Approve the appointment of Councillor Martha Vickers as the West Berkshire Council representative on the Hampshire Together Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the recommendation was for the Council to join the existing Hampshire Together Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As residents of West Berkshire were significant users of health facilities in Hampshire, Councillor Brooks indicated that by joining the Committee, the Council could have a voice in how services were run and could help to shape the future of these facilities. Due to her background and experience, Councillor Martha Vickers was proposed to be the Council's representative on that Committee.

Council noted that West Berkshire residents used health facilities from a range of neighbouring authority areas, and for that reason, the Council should have a voice in their operation. As Members were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations as laid out.

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

11. Recommendations of the West Berkshire Independent Remuneration Panel 2024

Council considered a report (Agenda item 11) concerning the recommendations of the West Berkshire Council Independent Remuneration Panel following their meetings on 4 and 5 June 2024.

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

That Council:

- (a) Agree to the recommendations of the IRP as set out in paragraph 5.9 of the report.
- (b) Delegate authority to the Service Director (Strategy and Governance) to amend Part 14 of the Constitution (Members' Allowances Scheme) and the associated procedures and guidance in line with any changes agreed by full Council.
- (c) Circulates the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for West Berkshire Parish and Town Councils to all of its town and parish councils for information.

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Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the recommendation around member remuneration was made by an independent group and not by Councillors. The Panel had considered both the recent inflationary impact as well as the significant amount of work done by Members in coming to their conclusion. He also emphasised that the vote on the item would be based on Members' consciences and not party line but that they could forgo the allowance if they chose to. Councillor Brooks indicated that West Berkshire's Member remuneration was the second lowest of all unitary authorities in the Southeast region, and that in order to attract Councillors from a wider range of backgrounds, they needed to have a reasonable compensation.

Members then discussed the recommendation, noting that that the increase was marginal, of only £479 per year, just over £9 per week. In addition, a fairer remuneration to Members would also allow for more people from a wider socio-economic background to become Councillors. A point was also made that reasonable increases over time would prevent the need for a larger adjustment in the future.

Overall, as Members were satisfied with the report from the Independent Remuneration Panel, they agreed to approve the recommendations as laid out.

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

12. Notices of Motion

Council considered the under-mentioned urgent Motion (Agenda item 13) submitted in the name of Councillor Matt Shakespeare relating to the Government proposal to end of universal winter fuel payments.

At this point, Councillor Ross Mackinnon raised a point of order about the grounds of urgency on which the Motion was being brought to Council. In response, the Deputy Monitoring Officer clarified that the urgent Motion was accepted by the Chairman as there was limited time between the ending of the winter fuel allowance and the onset of winter.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Matt Shakespeare and seconded by Councillor Martha Vickers.

That Council:

“Notes the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits.

Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower and middle incomes will now not receive these payments which are critical for their well-being. Across England and Wales, the number of people eligible for winter fuel payments will fall by 10 million (from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million).

Council believes that the Labour Government has set the threshold at which pensioners will not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments is far too low. Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not in receipt. Council recognises the role we must play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support to which they are entitled.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined with the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of West Berkshire pensioners into fuel poverty.

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Council welcomes and appreciates the work being undertaken by the Welfare Support and Public Health teams, with Citizens Advice and Age UK, to promote the Pension Credit scheme to those who may be eligible.

Council therefore resolves to:

- instruct the Leader to write to Olivia Bailey MP asking her to give her formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility, Lee Dillon MP, having already given his support.*
- invite the leaders of the Opposition and the minority group to sign a joint letter with the Leader to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed along with pausing the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt introducing a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments.
In the event that they are not prepared to sign such a letter then Council instructs the Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting same.*
- Urgently commence an awareness campaign to maximise the uptake of pension credits, including, the use of council noticeboards, social media and promotion in the local press, publication in the Council's digital and printed materials such as the newsletter and magazine, running a leaflet campaign and all other reasonable measures, including assisting them in making applications for Pension credit that will help in what will be a difficult time for many of them."*

Councillor Shakespeare introduced the Motion, highlighting that the winter fuel allowance helped with the cost of heating for millions of homes and was especially valuable to residents during the recent period of rising energy prices. He went on to outline the Government proposal for limiting the payment to only those claiming pension credit, resulting in 28,000 residents no longer receiving the payment. Although he acknowledged that some of those people may not need the allowance, he emphasised that only 63 per cent of those eligible for pension credit took up the scheme. For these reasons, the Motion called for the Member of Parliament for Reading West and Mid Berkshire, Olivia Bailey MP, to be requested to halt the change in policy. In addition, the Motion called for a campaign to help increase the uptake of the pension credit by those who were eligible.

Councillor Clive Taylor spoke to the Motion and indicated that, had he been a Member of Parliament, he would have voted against the bill. Although he respected Olivia Bailey MP's decision, he would be meeting with her to discuss the matter. Although he believed that introducing a threshold would be acceptable, Councillor Taylor considered the proposed threshold by Government was set too low and so he would support the Motion as proposed.

Councillor Marsh spoke to the Motion and expressed his belief that through means testing the benefit, some residents who needed the payments would not receive them. For that reason, he supported the payments remaining universal and agreed with the Motion.

Councillor Culver also expressed her support for the Motion and highlighted that the promotion of pension credits could be done both online and through newsletters as well as through Members going out into the community and meeting face to face with their residents to help them enrol.

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Councillor Mackinnon outlined his opinion that the Council should be debating issues of local importance over national and international ones. However, he did believe the Motion was applicable to the Council just as the Household Support Fund was. As he agreed with the need to support pensioners with fuel costs over the winter, he issued his support for the motion.

Councillor Dillon emphasised the pertinent part of the Motion to him, being the campaign for an increased uptake of pension credits. He also noted that there was insufficient time and support given to people who would be losing the allowance. Councillor Dillon also expressed a desire to provide help to anyone who needed it rather than it just going to people of a certain age. However, as he did not want to be lobbying a fellow Member of Parliament, he indicated that he would abstain on the vote.

Councillor Brooks responded to the point by Councillor Mackinnon about discussing national and international issues and highlighted that Council should discuss issues of national importance as well as local ones as they both effected West Berkshire residents. In a point of reply, Councillor Mackinnon emphasised that his focus was on local issues and what was in the Council's area of control.

Councillor Martha Vickers thanked Councillor Shakespeare for bringing the Motion forward and noted that as elderly residents were generally less active and stayed in their homes more, the winter fuel allowance was highly valued. She believed that the Government needed to revisit the threshold as it would be better to include some who did not need it rather than excluding some who did. Councillor Vickers then echoed the points about drawing more attention to pension credits, but she also mentioned that charities had felt an increased demand from residents for help to fill out the necessary forms and that the length of the application may dissuade claimants. For all these reasons, Councillor Vickers indicated her support for the Motion.

Overall, Council agreed with the Motion and supported its adoption.

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

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 8.19 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature