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

ANNUAL COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025

Councillors Present: Billy Drummond (Chairman), Tony Vickers (Vice-Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Carolyne Culver, Paul Dick, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander, Jane Langford, Janine Lewis, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Tom McCann, Biyi Oloko, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Christopher Read, Matt Shakespeare, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Sarah Clarke (Monitoring Officer and Interim Executive Director for Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Jon Winstanley (Service Director for Environment), Melanie Booth (Group Executive – Liberal Democrats), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive – Conservatives), Sam Chiverton (Zoom Host), Darius Zarazel (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, Honorary Alderman Graham Pask

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, Councillor Nick Carter, Councillor Vicky Poole, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Emma Webster, Honorary Alderman Mollie Lock, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, and Honorary Alderman Rick Jones

PART I

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman reflected on his year in office, indicating that he had attended 112 engagements during his term. Some of those events and duties which he highlighted included numerous citizenship ceremonies, which he urged Members to attend, the 80-year anniversary of VE day, remembrance services, both the Newbury and Thatcham Mayor Making ceremonies, the swearing in ceremony for the High Sheriff of Berkshire, consecration of the Bishop of Reading, and famously the unveiling of Paddington Bear.

The Chairman also extended his heartfelt thanks to the Vice-Chairman and Vice-Chairman's Consort for their support during his term as well as the former Chairman, Councillor Jeremy Cottam, for standing in when requested. In addition, the Chairman expressed his gratitude to Melanie Booth, Group Executive - Liberal Democrats, Ben Ryan, Democratic Services Officer, and Darius Zarazel, Principal Democratic Services Officer, for their support.

Overall, the Chairman emphasised that he was extremely grateful for the opportunity that had been afforded to him and that he would always remember his time as Chairman.

The Vice-Chairman also spoke about his year in office, highlighting his attendance at several appointments, and thanked the Chairman for his diligent work during 2024/25.

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2. **Presentations**

The Chairman made presentations to Mrs Sharon Drummond, the Chairman's Consort for the year 2024/25.

3. **Election of the Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/26**

Council considered the election of Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/26. Councillor Denise Gaines nominated Councillor Tony Vickers to the position of Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Nigel Foot. There were no further nominations received.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Denise Gaines and seconded by Councillor Nigel Foot: "That Councillor Tony Vickers be elected as Chairman of Council for the Municipal Year 2025/26."

The proposer and seconder spoke in support of their nomination. Councillor Gaines informed Council that Councillor Vickers had been a member of the Liberal Democrats since he was in sixth form. Having spent 20 years serving in the armed forces and specialising in the Royal Engineers Survey Branch, he settled in Newbury in 1987. After retiring in 1995, Councillor Vickers was elected to the Council from the Kintbury Ward. Due to his demonstrable knowledge, expertise, and work he had done as a Member of the Council, Councillor Gaines strongly recommended Councillor Vickers to the position of Chairman.

In addition, Councillor Foot highlighted the support that Councillor Vickers would receive from his wife, Councillor Martha Vickers, and also recommended Councillor Vickers' appointment to Chairman. Noting Councillor Vickers' theme, Councillor Foot welcomed his focus on the preservation and enhancing of the natural environment, sustainability in development, and providing faith in a better future. For these reasons, he seconded the nomination of Councillor Vickers as Chairman of West Berkshire Council.

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

Councillor Vickers (The Chairman) read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Chairman thanked all Members for their support and declared that it was an honour to be elected Chairman. He noted that, although remaining a Liberal Democrat, the position of Chairman was not party political and that in the spirit of the words on the Council's Coat of Arms, he would take the district 'Forward Together'.

The Chairman outlined his theme for the year, 'faith in our future'. Being keen to showcase deserving activities that were being done across the district, the Chairman welcomed invitations from Members, Council partners, and others, to promote worthy causes.

He also indicated that he would like to visit every parish in the district, celebrate excellence in new building design through a new award scheme, and promote his chosen charity, Good Hope Farm. This charity allowed young adults with special needs to enjoy outdoor activities and also helped the volunteers on the farm work through mental health conditions.

4. **Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/26**

Council considered the election of Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2025/26. The Chairman nominated Councillor Stephanie Steevenson to the position of Vice-Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery. There were no further nominations received.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery:

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"That Councillor Stephanie Steevenson be elected as Vice-Chairman of Council for the Municipal Year 2025/26."

The proposer and seconder spoke in support of their nomination. The Chairman informed Council that Councillor Steevenson was acting as a local representative of the Thatcham Royal British Legion at their national conference and so had issued her apologies for the meeting. Having spent many years in the armed forces, Councillor Steevenson had continued to be involved in uniformed organisations since her retirement and was currently the Armed Forces Champion at the Council and was a representative on the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel. She had also been a volunteer for Berkshire Guides and had been a teacher for special educational needs and disability (SEND) children for a number of years. Due to her passion and commitment, the Chairman was happy to nominate Councillor Steevenson to the position of Vice-Chairman of West Berkshire Council.

In seconding this nomination, Councillor Jeffery noted that Councillor Steevenson had been a commendable Mayor of Thatcham, getting involved with those who often felt left behind or ignored. He hoped to see Councillor Steevenson continue to be fair, even-handed, and assiduous during her time as Vice-Chairman.

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

As Councillor Steevenson had issued her apologies for the meeting, Council noted that she would read and sign the Declaration of Acceptance of Office as soon as practicable after the meeting.

At this point, Councillor Billy Drummond left the meeting.

5. Minutes

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

"That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman."

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

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Densie Gaines:

"That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman."

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

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

7. Updates from Committees

Council noted the meetings that had been held since the last ordinary meeting of Council as laid out in Agenda Item 8.

8. Appointment of the Executive by the Leader of the Council for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, highlighted that the additional workload generated from devolution and local government reorganisation required additional Executive resources, and so this had been added to Councillor Justin Pemberton's Portfolio.

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In addition, Councillor Tom McCann had been appointed to the Executive and would be the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment). Councillor McCann's experience with the built environment was highlighted to Council and the Leader emphasised that it would be Councillor McCann who would ensure that the Council's key capital projects were kept on track.

As all the other Executive Members from 2024/25 would retain their portfolios, the composition of the Executive for the Municipal Year 2025/26 was announced to be as follows:

Councillor Jeff Brooks	–	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications
Councillor Denise Gaines	–	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing
Councillor Patrick Clark	–	Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Councillor Heather Codling	–	Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services
Councillor Iain Cottingham	–	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Councillor Nigel Foot	–	Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside
Councillor Stuart Gourley	–	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways
Councillor Tom McCann	–	Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment)
Councillor Justin Pemberton	–	Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
Councillor Vicky Poole	–	Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme

In response to these appointments, some opposition Members expressed disappointment about the additional allowance that would be paid by moving from nine to ten Members of the Executive, noting that almost a quarter of all Council Members would then be in receipt of an allowance for being on the Executive.

In response, the Leader noted that the additional resource was needed in order to best meet the challenges and opportunities of local government reorganisation and to achieve the delivery of their capital programme. For these reasons, he considered the additional appointment to be value for money.

9. Leader of the Council's Annual Report

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, made his Annual Report to Council. He highlighted the progress that had been made in regard to provision for special educational needs and disability (SEND) children as well as with adult social care. As a result of the increased demand for these services, the Council now spent 64 pence in every pound on these areas. Due to financial pressures, the Administration changed the way the Council worked, from improving recruitment rates, significantly reducing spend on temporary workers – achieving a reduction of £6m – and reducing staff turnover.

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Several deliverables were also highlighted to Council. These included investments in young people and schools – such as the building of new classrooms, a new I-College, and the provision of new mental health and SEND support – improvements to roads, homes, transport, and leisure facilities – such as being on track to deliver 1000 affordable homes by 2030, football being brought back to Faraday Road, reducing pothole depth needed for repairs, planning to repair 60 kilometres of roads in the Municipal Year, and introducing 14 new 20 miles per hour limited areas – and finally to protecting the environment – such as by reaffirming the Council's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2030, having installed 13 Kerbocharge points and with 72 EV points installed or in progress, promoting recycling (with West Berkshire now being in the top 15% of recycling Councils in England) and with several million invested to safeguard chalk streams and to help with flood alleviation. The Leader concluded by highlighting the principles of the Council, those of Customer Focus, Integrity, and Fairness and that these were driving the Administration's actions.

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, and the Leader of the Minority Group, Councillor David Marsh, asked several questions of the Leader.

On why the Administration was planning to continue with the extension of the pedestrianisation of Newbury Town Centre despite the majority of residents responses to the consultation being against the proposal, the Leader highlighted that the extension was only a trial. After the trial period had ended, it would be assessed to see if it had worked, and if it was determined that it had not been successful, it would be stopped.

In addition, the Leader was questioned as to why the case in favour of pedestrianisation was not being proactively made on social media, leaving room for unchecked opposition, as was also suggested to have been the case with three weekly bin collections. In response, the Leader indicated that the Administration were using a wide range of communication methods to convey their policies, not just social media, in order to try to engage with all residents.

The Leader was also questioned as to whether the Administration was meeting their Manifesto commitment around ensuring that consultations were detailed, and residents' views were listened to, as they had proceeded with both pedestrianisation and three weekly bin collections despite residents being against the proposals when they were consulted. In response, the Leader noted the number of consultation outcomes the former Conservative Administration had not followed and that three weekly bin collections had been done in other authorities in the country. Although they were not widely approved of before implementation, the Leader believed that residents were satisfied with those services once they were in place. He also indicated that it would help assist with recycling uptake.

Council noted the Leader's reassurance to users of the Resource Centres that if the service could not be provided privately, the changes to the Resource Centres would not go ahead.

10. **Amendments to the Constitution to Support Changes to Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 11) concerning amendments to the Constitution in order to support changes to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

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

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“That Council:

- A) approves the proposed changes to the Scrutiny Model effective from 15 May 2025, replacing the two existing committees (Scrutiny Commission and Health Scrutiny Committee), with three committees as follows:
- Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee
 - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
 - Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee
- (b) delegates amendments to the Constitution that are necessary to accommodate the above changes to the Scrutiny Model (outlined in Section 5 of this report) to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Constitution Review Task Group
- (c) approves the updated programme of public meetings required to accommodate the above changes to the Scrutiny Model (as set out in Appendix C)”

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that Council was asked to consider a new structure for how scrutiny would be conducted. This would involve the creation of three Scrutiny Committees, each with their distinct areas of focus, and the replacement of the Planning, Transport, and Environment Advisory Groups with a new Executive body called the Policy Development Group (PDG). The membership of the PDG would be drawn from all Members of the Council and would be used to help develop specific policies which could be taken forward for adoption.

The Governance Committee had discussed these proposals at their meeting on 29 April 2025 and had raised several concerns with the proposals. However, Council noted that there was a desire to give the Scrutiny Committees more influence and for them to work more effectively. For these reasons, the recommendations had remained and were being put before Council. Members noted that the proposals had also been discussed with the Group Leaders who were generally supportive of them as they would make the Council more in line with how scrutiny was conducted in other similar authorities. However, some Members indicated that they would have liked the proposals to have been taken through the existing Scrutiny Commission for their input.

Members emphasised the necessity of sufficient Officer support for these new Scrutiny Committees and highlighted the extensive work that the Principal Democratic Services Officer, Gordon Oliver, and the Principal Policy Officer, Vicky Phoenix, had been providing to the current structure. Having opposition group Members chairing some of the Scrutiny Committees was also agreed to be a positive inclusion but they noted that training, especially for new Members of these Committees, would be essential in order to run the meetings as effectively as they could be. These proposals were also noted as helping to ensure that proper scrutiny was put on key service areas, such as adult and children services.

In response to questions about the PDG, particularly about its Terms of Reference, membership, and proportionality, Council was informed that the Group’s membership would be open to all Members and would allow them all to contribute to policy development rather than it being controlled by the Executive. In addition, the Terms of Reference would not be voted on as it was a body of the Executive, not Council.

In response to a point about the Council’s internal governance processes, Council was assured that Corporate Board would not block the progression of any report unless it was unaffordable or not legally possible.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

11. **Appointment of and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2025/26 Municipal Year**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 12) concerning the appointment and allocation of seat on the Council's Committees for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

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

- "That Council is informed 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 of the report are to be regarded as Members of the Liberal Democrat Group, Conservative Group, and Minority Group respectively.
- That 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 5.5 of the report.
- That 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 5.16 of the report.
- That the number of substitutes on each of the Committees be as set out at paragraph 5.19 of the report.
- 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.
- That 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.
- That Council, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as amended, agrees that the Council's Policy Framework for 2025/26 be as set out in paragraph 5.23 of this report, and that any necessary amendments be made to the Council's Constitution.
- That 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 Council notes that Part 2, 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 up to two non-voting co-opted Parish/Town Councillors be made to the Governance Committee as detailed within Appendix A of the report.
- 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.

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- To note the membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board as set out in Appendix C of the report.
- 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.
- That Council is also informed about the Council Bodies Rules as detailed at Part 6 of the Constitution detailed at Appendix E to the report.”

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that this included the previously agreed changes to the Scrutiny Committees and put forward how the seats on all the Council’s Committees would be allocated to different groups. Council noted that membership of the Personnel Committee had also been recommended to be increased up to seven Members, from five, in order to avoid quoracy issues.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report and the proposed appointments to Committees, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

12. **Appointments to Outside Bodies for the 2025/26 Municipal Year**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 13) concerning the appointment to those outside bodies whose membership was reserved to Council.

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

“That Council:

A) approves the appointments for the Municipal Year 2025/26, in accordance with Appendix A, of Member representatives to the following outside bodies:

- Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

B) notes the appointments as detailed in Appendix A of Member representatives to the Local Government Association General Assembly.”

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that it proposed several outside body appointments and that they were proportionate to the allocation of Groups on the Council.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report and the proposed appointments to outside bodies, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

13. **West Berkshire Council Member Charter**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 14) concerning the West Berkshire Council Member Charter.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“That Council approves the adoption of the Member Charter.”

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the Council already had a number of principles guiding conduct, such as the Code of Conduct, but that the Member Charter was a new commitment to behaviour between Members and Council staff.

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The Charter was adapted from the one that was used at the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and had been discussed and agreed with all the Group Leaders. The Charter was a commitment to put community first and that work between Members and Officers would be open and honest. Members would be accountable for their own behaviour and challenge it where it fell short of the highest standards. The importance of treating Council staff with respect and preventing bullying behaviour was also emphasised.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the proposals, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

14. Review of Council Strategy performance measures

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 15) concerning the review of the Council Strategy's Performance Measures.

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

"That Council:

- A) approves a revised reporting framework for the Council Strategy.
- B) approves the 12 areas of focus detailed at paragraph 5.12 to assist in the determination of new high priority measures for the year 2025-26."

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that it was a refresh of the Strategy and Delivery Plan. The Executive had examined a number of measures in the Delivery Plan and was proposing to focus on 20 high priority areas. Council was also recommended to adopt the new 12 areas of focus. He noted that there had been a number of adjustments, removals, and combining of performance measures which would allow the Council to be more effective and focused in its reporting and that this decision was taken following the outcome of the Council's peer review.

It was suggested that Measure HP08 and HP09, about bringing empty homes back into use and closing the attainment gap, should not be under the 'Tackling Climate and Ecological Emergency' Priority Area.

In response to a question about the removal of the residents' surveys, Council noted that the Administration wanted continuous feedback, not a once every two-year consultation. Some Members also expressed concern about the removal of the target to reduce the number of times the Executive considered items in a private session (Part II). On the de-prioritisation of the draft Framework, Members noted that this would be kept in review, although the Council had prioritised flood and drainage improvements.

Some Members indicated that the removal of many measures indicated that the Administration was giving up on those areas. However, other Members suggested that this indicated a consolidation and streamlining of reporting which would then help guide the work of the Administration in a more effective way.

In order to better understand the history of the measures, it was suggested that the significant dates of the items be included in the report. This would help with transparency as it would show areas where deadlines had not been met.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

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15. Planning Appendix Constitutional Update

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 16) concerning the Planning Appendix Constitutional update.

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

“That Council:

- A) approves Part 6.8 Planning Appendix for adoption as set out in Appendix A to the report;
- B) approves Part 11 Scheme of Delegation be updated as set out in Appendix B to the report;
- C) delegates to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Constitution Review Task Group, the power to update Parts 6.8 and 11 of the Constitution to ensure that this reflects the new rules, and to make any minor additional corrections to the parts of the Constitution to ensure consistency in terminology and presentation; and
- D) approves that the changes to the Constitution detailed in this report, take effect from 1 June 2025.

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the Constitution Review Task Group (CRTG) had been working systematically through every part of the Constitution, and that this was the latest result of that work. Council noted that the Governance Committee had reviewed the report and recommended it be approved by Council. Councillor Brooks also indicated that the Group would be looking to make the Constitution more navigable in a future update.

Several Members expressed support for the reconsideration of a point in the Constitution that required Substitute Members to be from the same political groups. They noted that planning was not a political committee and so, in the event that a Member was unable to attend a meeting, they should be permitted to call on a substitute from any party. However, it was noted that substitution rules were determined by political proportionality, and so this may not likely be able to be amended.

Some Members also indicated that hearing the speech from the adjoining Ward Member before the actual Ward Member had spoken was not the most effective order of speaking, and that this should also be reviewed. Some Members also suggested that Executive Members sitting on Planning Committees where a Council proposal was to be considered should be reviewed. This was suggested in order to help create distance between the applicant and determiner. Members noted that the CRTG would discuss these suggestions when the Group re-examined this section of the Constitution.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 9.22 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature