

# DRAFT

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

## EXECUTIVE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2025

**Councillors Present:** Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Heather Codling (Vice-Chairman), Nigel Foot, Stuart Gourley, Tom McCann, Justin Pemberton and Vicky Poole

**Also Present:** ,

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Iain Cottingham and Councillor Denise Gaines

**Councillor(s) Absent:**

#### PART I

##### 1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 July, and 17 July 2025 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. Verbal Statement by the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Councillor Patrick Clark, made an announcement in relation to the future of the Adult Social Care Resource Centres. To view the speech and ensuing comments in full please access this [link](#).

##### 4. Public Questions

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

##### 5. Petitions

Councillor Clive Taylor presented a petition on behalf of Unison containing 1,332 signatures which requested that the Council think again and revise its decision to close the Adult Social Care Resource Centres.

The petition had been fully answered by Councillor Patrick Clark's earlier statement and was consequently deemed addressed.

##### 6. Adult Social Care Annual Report 2024/25 (EX4690)

Councillor Patrick Clark introduced the Adult Social Care Annual Report 2024/25 (Agenda Item 7), which provided an overview of performance and key achievements.

Councillor Dominic Boeck queried how sustainable the staffing levels were given the rising demand. Councillor Clark acknowledged that there would always be a need for additional staff but that they needed to be balanced with current financial constraints.

Councillor Boeck noted that nearly half of the Council's £10.7m savings were in doubt and queried how confident the Portfolio Holder was that this would not undermine the levels of service provided. Councillor Clark commented that it was important for the

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Executive to continue to analyse where savings were being made and to review on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Boeck queried how the effectiveness of Magic Notes and robotic pets was being evaluated. Paul Coe, Executive Director of Adult Social Care, explained that there had been a pilot phase with Magic Notes prior to committing to wider use and that already staff had reported greater job satisfaction and savings in administrative time.

Councillor Vicky Poole commented that it was impossible to quantify the value or impact of a comfort pet, particularly as they were provided to the most vulnerable people who felt much more comforted from receiving them. Councillor Poole further noted that in addition to Magic Notes the Council were also trialling Minute AI as an AI solution to save time and increase officer efficiency.

Councillor Boeck noted that care assessments were still backlogged and queried when carers would receive timely support. Paul Coe explained that a further innovation introduced by the Service was an online assessment platform for carers which had been financed by government funding and co-produced with local carers.

Commending the revised decision on Adult Social Care Resource Centres, Councillor David Marsh made a plea for the care homes to remain run by the local authority.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The report is for information only; there are no recommendations. The information will be published on the West Berkshire Council internet.

## **7. Section 20 Payment Policy (EX4730)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which proposed the introduction of a Section 20 Parental Contribution Policy. It was noted that the Policy was being introduced to ensure that the Council was compliant with legislation. It was anticipated that the Policy would affect only a very small number of families.

Councillor Codling noted a minor amendment under section 5.7 of the report and substituted the word 'aware' with 'area'.

Councillor Dominic Boeck queried how it could be ensured that the introduction would not deter families from seeking early help. Councillor Codling responded that discussion of payment would be a later conversation and would not be at the forefront when taking a child into care.

Councillor Boeck queried the safeguards in place to ensure that decisions were fair and consistent. Councillor Codling commented that each case would depend on individual family circumstances and that she trusted the professionalism of Council staff.

Councillor Justin Pemberton further added that the Council's first priority was the child's safety and welfare, not how much to charge parents. He continued that before a child became known to the Council there was likely to be a significant amount of intervention. Councillor Pemberton confirmed that there were a number of safeguards within the Policy and that it was a voluntary agreement between the parents and Council.

Councillor Pemberton seconded the recommendations within the report.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Approve the policy in line with legislative requirements.
- Recognise the policy allows for the consideration of a Parental Contribution under S.20 for the care of children.

**8. Faraday Road 3G Pitch Development (EX4725)**

Councillor Nigel Foot introduced the report (Agenda Item 9), which reported on the result of a feasibility study and outlined the business case regarding the provision of a 3G pitch to replace the grass pitch at Faraday Road and sought to include the project within the 2025/26 and 2026/27 capital programme.

It was explained that the Council had chosen to fund the project itself in order to fast track the project and retain grant funding for other pitches in the district, subject to the findings of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Councillor David Marsh thanked Councillor Foot for the report and commented that he was delighted by the proposal. Councillor Marsh queried whether it would be possible to see the ecology report that had been prepared for the site and how biodiversity net gain could be achieved. He further queried whether any grants were available to support the project. Councillor Foot responded that a planning application had been submitted with a number of pre-conditions already addressed, and that the ecology report and biodiversity net gain assessment would be included as part of that application. He further commented that Executive preferred to allocate grant money to pitches identified by the Playing Pitch Strategy.

Councillor Howard Woollaston commented that the pitch at Faraday Road had cost approximately £2 million to date and queried whether that was good value for money, given that there were no permanent changing rooms or stands at the pitch. He suggested that the whole project had been conducted in a piecemeal manner and queried why a 3G pitch had not been installed initially. Councillor Foot responded that the administration was redressing a fault by the previous administration and that the cost for the Monks Lane project of £214,000, and the £210,000 spent on clearing the site was money that could have been spent on Faraday Road.

Councillor Woollaston commented that the debris on the site was due to arson and nothing to do with the previous administration. He commented that there had also been a scheme in place which would have allowed for a 3G pitch immediately if pursued. Councillor Woollaston queried why Councillor Foot had not sought to implement the original planning application consent as soon as elected. Councillor Foot responded that there were several pre-conditions in the original application which had now been addressed in the current more robust application.

Councillor Woollaston commented that he was happy that football was back to Faraday Road as it was now the only location available in Newbury to take a football pitch, however he wished the 3G pitch had been actioned sooner.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

**RESOLVED that:**

- That members be informed about the proposed project and to consider the business case to replace the grass football pitch at Faraday Road.
- To include the funding for the project in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 capital programme.

**9. 2025/26 Performance Report Q1 (EX4542)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced the Quarter One report (Agenda Item 10), 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 noted that the format and presentation of the report was evolving and had improved already, including a set of twelve new high priority measures.

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Councillor Stuart Gourley referred to pothole repairs and commented that throughout July, August and September to date they had been cleared with a 100% success rate.

Councillor Dominic Boeck queried why so many projects were repeatedly slipped and how further delays could be prevented. Councillor Brooke responded that projects were being centralised into an enhanced Project Management Office to avoid capital slippage.

Councillor David Marsh referred to the target of 1,000 affordable homes and queried whether that encompassed the entire sector, including rent, sale, social and affordable. Councillor Brooks commented that 469 had been delivered within the first two years, that performance was a little behind in the first quarter, and that it referred to all types of social and affordable housing. He commented that the problem was that there was not enough new development taking place.

Councillor Boeck noted that the report was evolving but queried how it could be proved that genuine improvements had been made against the new high priority measures, and whether it was not just a 'shifting of the goal posts'. Councillor Brooks commented that the drive to change the measures was to provide key specifics that it was felt that the organisation needed to focus and deliver on.

Councillor Heather Codling seconded the recommendations within the report.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Note the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027 priorities scheduled for this financial year.
- To 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.
- To note that the recommendations made in the Measures Review Report, approved by the Council on 15 May 2025, have been applied to this report.
- To acknowledge the launch of a Local Government Outcomes Framework (LGOF) by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), which has been incorporated to the Performance Reporting (Appendix A).
- For Executive to review the proposed new set of "High Priority" measures, derived from the 12 Areas of Focus introduced and approved by the Council on 15 May 2025.
- In accordance with the decision made by the Council on 15 May 2025, for the Executive to deliberate on the adoption of the new set of High Priority measures.
- For the Executive to note the proposed new structure of the Performance Report with two main elements – the Council Strategy Delivery Plan (CSDP) Update and the Core Performance Indicators.

### **10. Contract for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4726)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 11), 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.

It was noted that the contract related to the de-carbonisation of the Northcroft Leisure Centre, and Councillor Stuart Gourley commented that schools and leisure centres contributed a significant amount of carbon emissions from the Council's estates and consequently being able to use grant money towards the project would initiate and kick-start the Council's progress to carbon neutrality.

Councillor Howard Woollaston agreed that it was a great project but expressed concern at the forthcoming Highways Term Contract and requested that given local government

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reorganisation that the contract be negotiated on a short term rather than long term basis and that the Council ensure value for money. Councillor Gourley agreed and noted that extensive work had already been undertaken in preparation for the tender. It was reported there had already been a lot of interest in the pre-market engagement work which was positive when seeking best value for money.

Councillor Brooks clarified that the recommendations being agreed were detailed within the 'Conclusion' section of the report.

Councillor Gourley seconded the recommendations within the report.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Delegate authority to the relevant Service Director in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Portfolio Holder 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 Lead - Legal and Democratic in consultation with the relevant Service Director 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.

## **11. Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2025/26 Quarter One (EX4672)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 12), which presented the provisional outturn position for financial year 2025/26 as forecast at Quarter 1 against the approved capital programme and summarises the financing implications for financial year 2026/27.

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to Appendix A of the report and queried why capital enhancements on SEND Infrastructure Delivery had not been prioritised over discretionary schemes such as Northcroft Leisure Centre. Councillor Brooks commented that the administration was also frustrated by delays and reviewed the schemes on a weekly basis to try and accelerate some of the projects.

Councillor Heather Codling clarified that it was not due to prioritisation, but to having sufficient project management staff within the relevant positions.

Councillor Clive Taylor queried the status in relation to the Calcot Schools rationalisation project. Councillor Brooks responded that he was looking forward to visiting Tilehurst Parish Council and had been trying to book a date to attend. Councillor Brooks provided assurance that the administration committed to provide a re-build of the school, working alongside the school.

Councillor Codling seconded the recommendations within the report.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Approve the 2025/26 Quarter 1 reprofiling proposal of £12.41m. (Appendix A- summarises reprofiling requests).
- Note the Q1 Budget Reconciliation in Appendix B.
- Members are informed of the following adjustments to the 2025/26 capital programme:
  - £60,000 of external grant (UKSPF) for Community Garden at Shaw House

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- To note that the allocation of £0.2 million of grant funding relates to the Kennet Physically Disabled Resource (PDR) expansion to ensure that associated expenditure for the planned project is managed appropriately.

Members are asked to approve:

- £678k of Council funding relating to Digital Infrastructure Group needs to be re-instated. This request (2025/26) is an outstanding ring-fenced amount (£1,354k) allocated to the DIG (over 25/26 and 26/27) but omitted in error to be carried forward into 2023/24.

### 12. 2025/26 Revenue Financial Performance: Q1 (EX4673)

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced the report (Agenda Item 13), which provided a Quarter One update on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that approximately half of the savings detailed at section 5.2 of the report were displayed as being in doubt and queried what the solution would be. Councillor Brooks noted that the report reflected the end of Quarter One and that he had been informed that the shortfall could be made up by Quarter Two.

Shannon Coleman-Slaughter Service Lead, Financial, Reporting and Property, further emphasised that all Service Directors were looking at their savings to ensure robust forecasting, and to try to deliver the savings within the year.

#### **RESOLVED that:**

- That the projected overspend at Q1 is £2.89m which nets to £681k after the application of transformation funding, and that although not shown on this table, the projected overspend on the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant is £14m.

### 13. Members' Questions

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

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

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....