

Notice of Meeting



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Executive

Thursday 6 November 2025 at 6.00 pm

**in the Council Chamber, Council Offices,
Market Street, Newbury**

Note: This meeting can be streamed live here: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/executivelive>

Date of despatch of Agenda: Wednesday 29 October 2025

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer) on 01635 519052, e-mail: sadie.owen1@westberks.gov.uk

Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

To:	Councillors Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Heather Codling (Vice-Chairman), Iain Cottingham, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Tom McCann, Justin Pemberton and Vicky Poole
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Agenda

Part I

	Pages
1. Apologies for Absence To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any).	5 - 6
2. Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 25 September 2025.	7 - 12
3. Declarations of Interest To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any personal, disclosable pecuniary or other registrable interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct .	13 - 14
4. Public Questions Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by members of the public in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.	15 - 16
5. Petitions Councillors or Members of the public may present any petition which they have received. These will normally be referred to the appropriate Committee without discussion.	17 - 18

Items as timetabled in the Forward Plan

	Pages
6. 2025/26 Q2 Financial Performance Report (EX4674) Purpose: to report the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Q2 2025/26 outturn. The report details variances between the 2025/26 Budget (set in February 2025) and the current forecast for the financial year end position.	19 - 32
7. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025 (EX4745) Purpose: Ofsted visited West Berkshire's Children's Services to conduct a short ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) between 8 – 19 September 2025. The inspection report was published by Ofsted on 28 October 2025. This report provides an overview of Ofsted's findings.	33 - 52



Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday 6 November 2025 (continued)

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|-------|---|-----------|
| 8. | Rights of Way Improvement Plan (EX4700)
Purpose: to request that members adopt the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. | 53 - 122 |
| <hr/> | | |
| 9. | Local Planning Enforcement Plan 2025 (EX4735)
Purpose: to seek approval from Executive to carry out public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan. The Local Enforcement Plan is not a statutory requirement, but it is an important document which sets out the objectives and priorities of the planning enforcement service and provides information and guidance for residents, developers and other interested parties, on how complaints about unauthorised development are handled. | 123 - 160 |
| <hr/> | | |
| 10. | Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement (C4536)
Purpose: the Public Protection Partnership Service was subject to a peer review which concluded earlier in the year. In line with the negotiations on the recommendations of the review, the report seeks authorisation for West Berkshire Council to enter into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31 March 2029 and that Wokingham Borough Council becomes a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements. | 161 - 172 |
| <hr/> | | |
| 11. | Members' Questions
Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by Councillors in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution. | 173 - 174 |

Sarah Clarke.

Sarah Clarke
Executive Director: -Resources

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Sadie Owen on telephone (01635) 519052.



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Item 1 – Apologies for absence

Verbal Item

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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: Councillors Dominic Boeck, Howard Woollaston, David Marsh, Carolyn Culver and Clive Taylor

Officers Present: Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Sam Chiverton (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director – Finance, Property & Procurement), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director – Children’s Services), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic) and Jon Winstanley (Service Director Environment)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Iain Cottingham, Denise Gaines, Ross Mackinnon and Adrian Abbs

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.

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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 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.

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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.

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.

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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 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

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- 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
 - 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

Executive – 6 November 2025

Item 3 – Declarations of Interest

Verbal Item

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Executive – 6 November 2025

Item 4 – Public Questions

To follow

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Executive – 6 November 2025

Item 5 – Petitions

Verbal Item

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2025/26 Q2 Financial Performance Report

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	6 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Iain Cottingham
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	27/10/2025
Report Author:	Toby Bradley and Elizabeth Griffiths

1 Purpose of the Report:

Report financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Q2 2025/26 outturn. The report details variances between the 2025/26 Budget (set in February 2025) and the current forecast for the financial year end position. This allows the Executive to consider the authority's current financial position.

2 The Executive are informed of the following:

- 2.1 a) The forecast Q2 revenue outturn is **£6.8m/ 3.7% adverse** (Q2 vs Budget). Total net revenue is forecast at £190.2m in the Q2 outturn, vs £183.4m in the Budget.
- b) The Q2 reprofiling of £22.5m of capital budget, approved by the S151 officer in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance.
- c) The revised position at Q2 for expected capital expenditure in 2025/26 is £58.3m against an updated budget of £81.7m. £22.5m has been approved to slip to 2026/27 leaving a variance of £0.9m potentially unspent.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment:

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	The Council currently has a General Fund Reserve of just over £10m, which has been built utilising previously requested Exceptional Financial Support from central government. The Q2 2025/26 forecast will effectively reduce the General Fund Reserve by £6.8m, taking the fund under the level recommended by the section 151 as being financially sustainable. The pressures forecast at Q2 2025/26 relate predominantly to increasing commissioning costs over and above those anticipated at the time of budget setting, for the

	<p>current financial year. Future budget setting activity for 2026/27 and beyond must match the current level of commissioning price inflation pressure experienced in Q2 2025/26.</p> <p>A spending review panel is proposed to be enacted alongside the relaunch of the Financial Review Panel (see risk management section). The Council is now in a financial position where expenditure that does not fall into the category of essential must cease. Appendix A details the operational activity and constitution of the Spend Panel. The spend panel will be chaired and led by the 151 and appointed deputies.</p> <p>Shannon Coleman-Slaughter, 151 Officer, 10.10.2025</p>
Human Resource:	None
Legal:	None
Risk Management:	<p>The Financial Review Panel (FRP) is targeted for relaunch in November 2025 to allow greater focus on the risks and opportunities in each service. This forum is intended to scrutinise each services financial performance against budget and financial risks. FRP is to be used as a mechanism to inform future budget builds and gain a more granular understanding of the cost drivers of each revenue service budget.</p> <p>Treasury Management Group is reviewing the current borrowing levels against adopted Prudential Indicators (Investment & Borrowing Strategy), with a view to managing any longer-term interest rate risk exposure.</p> <p>As detailed under financial implications the Council is required to protect the General Fund and minimise any future requests for exceptional financial support. A spend panel to review expenditure incurred in the financial year is to be enacted to ensure only essential expenditure is incurred, allowing the Council to develop a plan for financial sustainability moving forward.</p>
Property:	Assets are under review by the Property Investment Board and the Asset and Capital Group in order to identify potential disposals which would be financially beneficial.

Policy:				
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The proposal aims to continue to protect those characteristics
Environmental Impact:		X		Unlikely to have any long-term environmental impact.
Health Impact:		X		
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:		X		All expenditure, revenue and capital, is aligned to the delivery of Council priorities. This report provides the latest forecast of the Councils expected year end out turn.
Core Business:		X		
Data Impact:		X		

Consultation and Engagement:

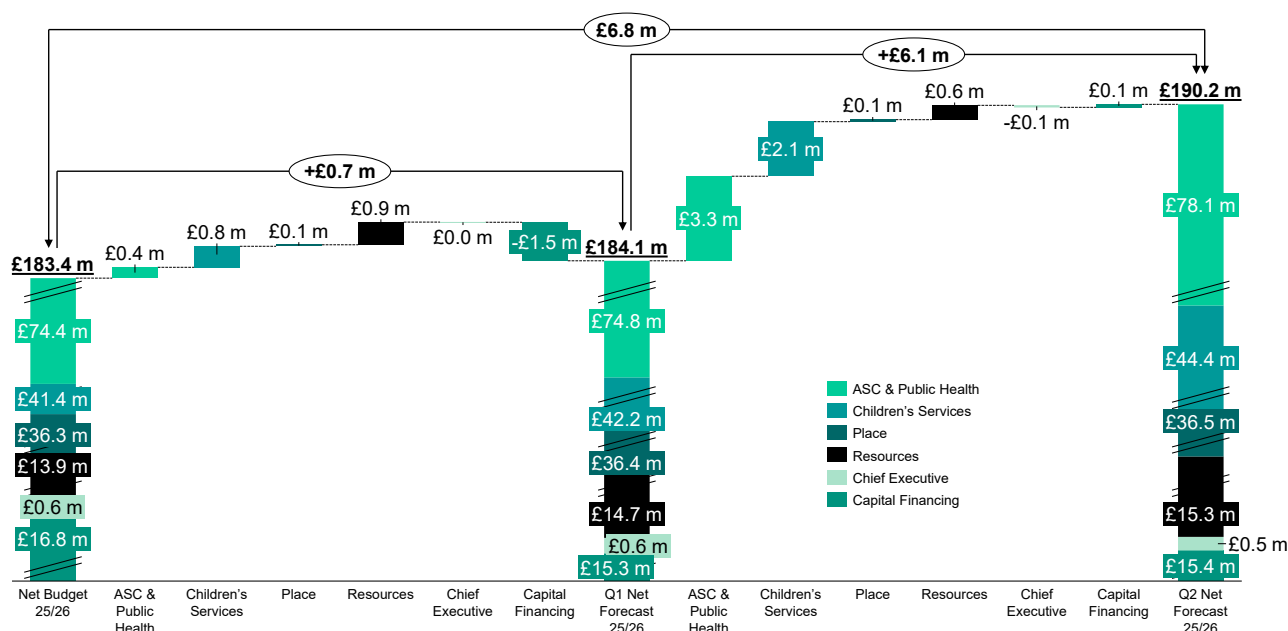
Service Directors, Executive Directors.

4 Executive Summary - Revenue

4.1 The projected outturn position for 2025/26, based on Q2 outturn is:

(a) an adverse revenue variance of **£6.8m/ 3.7%** vs Budget.

4.2 The below table walks revenue from 2025/26 Budget to 2025/26 Q2, by directorate:



The primary drivers of the adverse 2025/26 Q2 net £6.8m variance vs Budget are:

4.3 **Adult Social Care - £3.7m:** Primarily driven by Long Term Services/ LTS (£1.6m), and Own Care Homes (£1.9m). LTS is driven by discretionary rate increases above budget, and the increased cost of new packages, rather than the number of people in receipt of long-term care. The service has seen increased demand particularly relating to safeguarding referrals. The Own Care Homes adverse variance is driven by challenges in the process to source viable alternatives to operate them - the strategy of divesting WBC care homes has not yet been successfully executed. It is noted that Resource Centres drive a £0.5M adverse variance, and these centres will now remain open across 2025/ 26. The service is instituting new measures and controls to further scrutinise new commissioning packages, and to review high-cost placements. Work being developed in the Commissioning team is expected to support ASC with the management of unit costs within the social care market. This issue is seen across the national picture, due to a range of factors including National Living Wage, National Insurance contributions and wider inflation.

- 4.4 Children's Social Care - £2.6m:** Placements (£1.7m) and Child Care Lawyers (£0.9m) are the primary drivers of the adverse variance. Placements cost has been driven by the volume of children in care and the complexity of the care required (inc. younger children and babies). By example, residential care drives a gross adverse variance of £2.9m vs Budget. This is the result of an additional 3.5/ 20%, in annualised clients. The cost impact is driven broadly by a 50/ 50 split of volume (£1.5m) and rate (£1.4m) impacts. Lawyers costs have been driven by the increase in children entering care, and therefore the volume and complexity court hearings. To further illustrate the pressure faced by WBC in this area, the top 25 most expensive placements in the current financial year cost over £13m per year, or 7% of the entire Council budget. This figure was £5m in 2019-20, and the figure has increased by 165% in just over 5 years. Only one placement from 2019-20 would make it into the top 25 most expensive placements in the current financial year. The mix of placement costs has also changed significantly. In 2019-20, 15 of the 25 most expensive placements were for residents over the age of 18. In the current financial year, this figure has reduced to just 3 of the 25.
- 4.5 Transformation, Customer and ICT - £0.9m:** Primarily driven by Transformation at £1.1m, being the centralised savings from all transformation projects in WBC (£1m of TVI and £0.1m of business support review). It is unlikely that £1m of TVI benefit will be achieved in year. Note: as at 2025/26 Q2, £2.7m of transformation spend is planned to be funded by capital receipts (this value has already been removed from the £0.9m adverse variance).

Others smaller adverse variances are contained within:

- 4.6 Education and SEND - £0.4m.** Development and Housing - **£0.2m.** Finance Property and Procurement - **£0.2m.** Strategy and Governance - **£0.3m.**

These adverse variances are netted by a favourable variance in **Capital Finance - £1.4m:** Delivered through an active strategy of short-term borrowing, operating within our maturity framework. It should be noted, that although the Council's borrowing remains within the maturity structure adopted as part of the annual Investment & Borrowing Strategy (February 2025), carrying short term debt to avoid locking the Council into high cost long term borrowing creates a longer term financing risk should rates not start to reduce as anticipated. It should be further noted that financing underspends are also created in year through slippage of planned capital expenditure from 2025/26 into financial year 2026/27. Capital slippage is reviewed in further detail in section 7.1.

See below table for detail of gross and net expenditure and income, by directorate, by planning cycle:

2025/26 Q2 Financial Performance Report

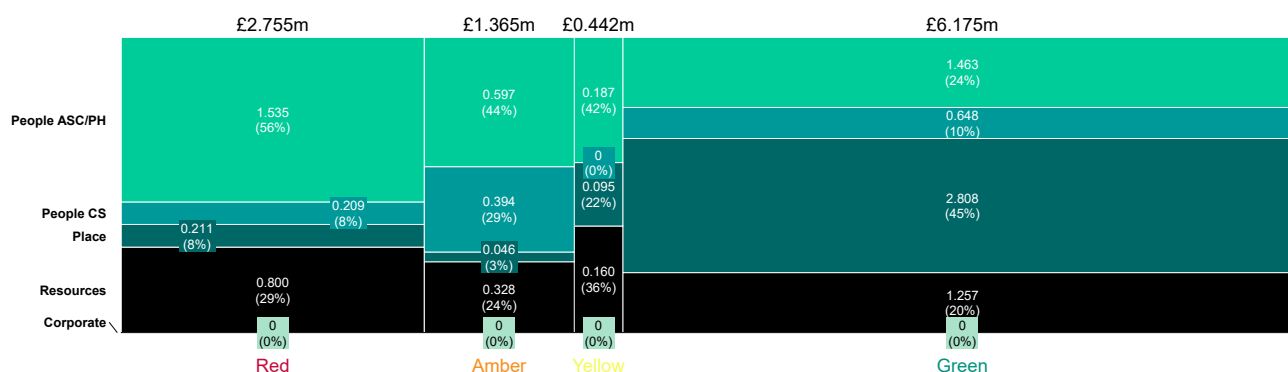
	Expenditure Budget 2025/26	Income Budget 2025/26	Net Budget 2025/26	Q1 Expenditure Forecast 2025/26	Q1 Income Forecast 2025/26	Q1 Net Forecast 2025/26	Q2 Expenditure Forecast 2025/26	Q2 Income Forecast 2025/26	Q2 Net Forecast 2025/26	Variance - Net Q2 vs Q1		Variance % - Net Q2 vs Budget	
ED People - ASC & Public Health	£0.3 m	£0.0 m	£0.3 m	£0.3 m	£0.0 m	£0.3 m	£0.3 m	£0.0 m	£0.3 m	2.9%	£0.0 m	-6.1%	£0.0 m
Adult Social Care	£100.2 m	-£26.0 m	£74.2 m	£101.3 m	-£26.6 m	£74.6 m	£103.9 m	-£26.0 m	£77.9 m	-4.4%	£3.3 m	5.0%	£3.7 m
Public Health & Wellbeing	£7.5 m	-£7.6 m	-£0.1 m	£7.2 m	-£7.4 m	-£0.1 m	£7.1 m	-£7.2 m	-£0.1 m	29.9%	£0.0 m	0.0%	£0.0 m
People - ASC & Public Health	£107.9 m	-£33.6 m	£74.4 m	£108.8 m	-£34.0 m	£74.8 m	£111.3 m	-£33.2 m	£78.1 m	4.4%	£3.3 m	5.0%	£3.7 m
ED People - Children's Services	£0.2 m	£0.0 m	£0.2 m	£0.2 m	£0.0 m	£0.2 m	£0.2 m	£0.0 m	£0.2 m	0.0%	£0.0 m	0.0%	£0.0 m
Children's Social Care	£35.7 m	-£2.9 m	£32.8 m	£36.5 m	-£3.2 m	£33.3 m	£38.9 m	-£3.6 m	£35.4 m	-6.1%	£2.0 m	7.9%	£2.6 m
Education & SEND	£12.0 m	-£3.2 m	£8.9 m	£12.1 m	-£2.9 m	£9.1 m	£12.5 m	-£3.3 m	£9.2 m	-0.8%	£0.1 m	4.1%	£0.4 m
Education (DSG Funded)	£153.0 m	-£153.5 m	-£0.4 m	£166.4 m	-£166.9 m	-£0.4 m	£153.0 m	-£153.5 m	-£0.4 m	0.0%	£0.0 m	0.0%	£0.0 m
People - Children's Services	£201.0 m	-£159.6 m	£41.4 m	£215.2 m	-£173.0 m	£42.2 m	£204.8 m	-£160.4 m	£44.4 m	5.0%	£2.1 m	7.1%	£2.9 m
Executive Director – Place	£0.3 m	£0.0 m	£0.3 m	£0.2 m	£0.0 m	£0.2 m	£0.2 m	£0.0 m	£0.2 m	3.2%	£0.0 m	-14.6%	£0.0 m
Community Services	£10.2 m	-£4.7 m	£5.5 m	£10.2 m	-£4.6 m	£5.6 m	£10.3 m	-£4.8 m	£5.5 m	1.2%	-£0.1 m	0.0%	£0.0 m
Environment	£40.1 m	-£13.1 m	£27.0 m	£41.3 m	-£14.4 m	£26.9 m	£42.0 m	-£15.0 m	£27.0 m	-0.2%	£0.0 m	0.0%	£0.0 m
Development & Housing	£8.1 m	-£4.5 m	£3.6 m	£9.9 m	-£6.2 m	£3.7 m	£10.5 m	-£6.7 m	£3.8 m	-3.1%	£0.1 m	4.8%	£0.2 m
Place	£58.7 m	-£22.4 m	£36.3 m	£61.6 m	-£25.2 m	£36.4 m	£63.0 m	-£26.5 m	£36.5 m	0.2%	£0.1 m	0.4%	£0.1 m
Transformation, Customer & ICT	£4.0 m	-£0.6 m	£3.4 m	£5.1 m	-£0.9 m	£4.2 m	£5.2 m	-£0.8 m	£4.4 m	-3.9%	£0.2 m	27.1%	£0.9 m
Executive Director - Resources	£0.8 m	£0.0 m	£0.8 m	£0.9 m	£0.0 m	£0.9 m	£0.9 m	£0.0 m	£0.9 m	4.9%	£0.0 m	2.9%	£0.0 m
Finance, Property & Procurement	£49.2 m	-£45.1 m	£4.0 m	£44.0 m	-£40.0 m	£4.0 m	£48.8 m	-£44.5 m	£4.3 m	-7.1%	£0.3 m	5.8%	£0.2 m
Strategy & Governance	£7.3 m	-£1.7 m	£5.6 m	£7.2 m	-£1.5 m	£5.7 m	£7.4 m	-£1.6 m	£5.8 m	-2.8%	£0.2 m	4.7%	£0.3 m
Resources	£61.2 m	-£47.4 m	£13.9 m	£57.2 m	-£42.4 m	£14.7 m	£62.3 m	-£47.0 m	£15.3 m	3.8%	£0.6 m	10.4%	£1.4 m
Chief Executive	£0.6 m	£0.0 m	£0.6 m	£0.6 m	£0.0 m	£0.6 m	£0.6 m	-£0.1 m	£0.5 m	13.9%	-£0.1 m	-14.9%	-£0.1 m
Chief Executive	£0.6 m	£0.0 m	£0.6 m	£0.6 m	£0.0 m	£0.6 m	£0.6 m	-£0.1 m	£0.5 m	-13.9%	-£0.1 m	-14.9%	-£0.1 m
Capital Financing & Management	£17.3 m	-£0.5 m	£16.8 m	£15.8 m	-£0.5 m	£15.3 m	£15.4 m	£0.0 m	£15.4 m	-0.8%	£0.1 m	-8.2%	-£1.4 m
Capital Financing and Mgmt	£17.3 m	-£0.5 m	£16.8 m	£15.8 m	-£0.5 m	£15.3 m	£15.4 m	£0.0 m	£15.4 m	0.8%	£0.1 m	-8.2%	-£1.4 m
WBC Total	£446.9 m	-£263.4 m	£183.4 m	£459.2 m	-£275.1 m	£184.1 m	£457.4 m	-£267.1 m	£190.2 m	3.3%	£6.1 m	3.7%	£6.8 m

5 Revenue Savings Update

5.1 £10.7m was identified as saving opportunities in 2025/ 26. More than half of these savings are on track to be delivered (green) with around one quarter showing as highly unlikely and not to be delivered (red). The breakdown for the RAG status is:

- **Green £6.2m/ 58%** – on track, either already delivered or no forecast issues with delivery.
- **Yellow £0.4m/ 4%** – on track, forecast to be delivered in year but some issues or dependencies still to be resolved.
- **Amber £1.4m/ 13%** – concerns over delivery, actions required to be implemented, needs to be closely monitored.
- **Red £2.8m/ 26%** – highly unlikely to be delivered this year, actions not yet identified, forecast as a pressure in budget monitoring.

See below graph which outlines performance by directorate with RAG rating:



Notes on interpreting the above graph: The width of each column represents the relative size of a category vs. the other categories (e.g. red, amber, yellow, green). The height of each segment within each column shows the composition of that category (e.g. resources, place, people). Therefore: Green is the biggest category (it has the biggest width/ value (at £6.2m)), and of this green category, place is the biggest contributor at £2.8m/ 45%.

5.2 The primary drivers of red initiatives are:

- (a) ASC - £1.5m: Care home sales strategy not yet executed.
- (b) CSC - £0.2m: Commissioning and Brokerage team implementation late, and establishment cost savings not realised.
- (c) Place - £0.2m: Solar farm income generation not being achieved, plus other smaller proposal not being met.
- (d) Resources - £0.8m: TVI savings related.

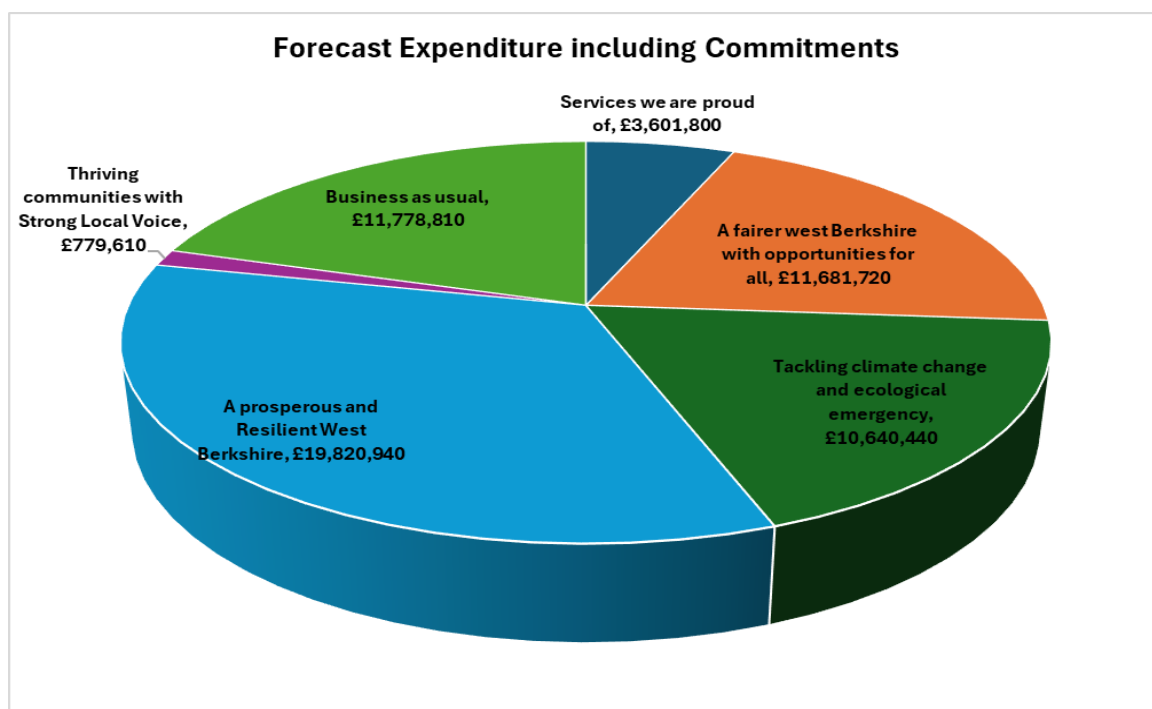
6 Executive Summary – Capital

- 6.1 The actual capital expenditure at Q2 for the financial year 2025/26 stands at £20.1m with forecast expenditure by the end of the year of £58.3m against a revised budget at Q2, net of slippage and new projects, of £81.7m.

Directorate	Service	Budget	Actual	Forecast	Variance (Budget-Forecast)	Q2 Reprofile request
		£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
People	Adult Social Care	3.0	0.4	3.0	(0.0)	0.0
People	Children's Social Care	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
People	Education & SEND	13.4	1.8	9.3	4.1	4.0
Place	Development & Housing	4.6	2.1	4.0	0.6	0.0
Place	Community Services	7.7	1.6	4.7	3.0	3.0
Place	Environment	46.2	12.8	32.0	14.2	14.6
Resources	Finance, Property & Procurement	2.9	0.3	2.0	0.8	0.8
Resources	Transformation, Customer & ICT	3.9	1.1	3.2	0.7	0.1
Total		81.7	20.1	58.3	23.4	22.5

6.2 Slippages have been authorised, as per the requirements of the constitution, by the S151 Officer and the portfolio holder for Finance, but members are asked to note them.

6.3



6.4 The split of the current year's forecast expenditure by Council priority is shown in the chart above at 7.3, with the largest proportion being allocated to "a prosperous and resilient West Berkshire".

6.5 Various new projects or changes in funding to existing projects have also been approved by the Asset and Capital Group during Q2 and these, along with slippage, form part of the budget movement in the period. Budget virements are noted in the table in section 8.3 below but the key new projects are:

6.6 £115k for improved visitor facilities at Shaw House. This is funded by external grants and CIL.

- £678k of Council funding for the superfast broadband project. This is a Berkshire wide initiative with other Councils contributing funding. This £678k is West Berkshire's promised contribution to the overall project.
- £118k of additional funding has been allocated to the expansion of the Berkshire records office. This increase is a mixture of external funding and a reallocation of existing budget.
- The budget for the Canal Bank restoration has reduced by £70k as external grant funding has been able to be applied, reducing the cost to the Council whilst ensuring the project is delivered.

6.7 In recognition of the Council's current financial position, ahead of budget setting, all projects have been reviewed to reduce the amount of Council funding required where possible, to manage the amount of CIL being spent to protect future CIL plans, and to minimise the impact on the Council's revenue budget from debt servicing and MRP. The forecast council funded expenditure for 2025/26 is £26.8m, which will incur ongoing revenue costs of approximately £1.2m per annum. The split between council funding and external funding of the 2025/26 programme is shown below.

Directorate	Service	Total Forecast		Council funds	External funds
		£m		£m	£m
People	Adult Social Care	3.0		2.1	0.9
People	Children's Social Care	0.0		0.0	0.0
People	Education & SEND	9.3		0.8	8.6
Place	Development & Housing	4.0		1.2	2.8
Place	Community Services	4.7		4.0	0.7
Place	Environment	32.0		13.8	18.2
Resources	Finance, Property & Procurement	2.0		2.0	0.0
Resources	Transformation, Customer & ICT	3.2		2.8	0.3
Total		58.3		26.8	31.5
				45.97%	54.03%

6.8 Q2 slippage into 2026/27 contains £13.85m of Council funded expenditure, which will create an additional £600k per year revenue impact in future financial years.

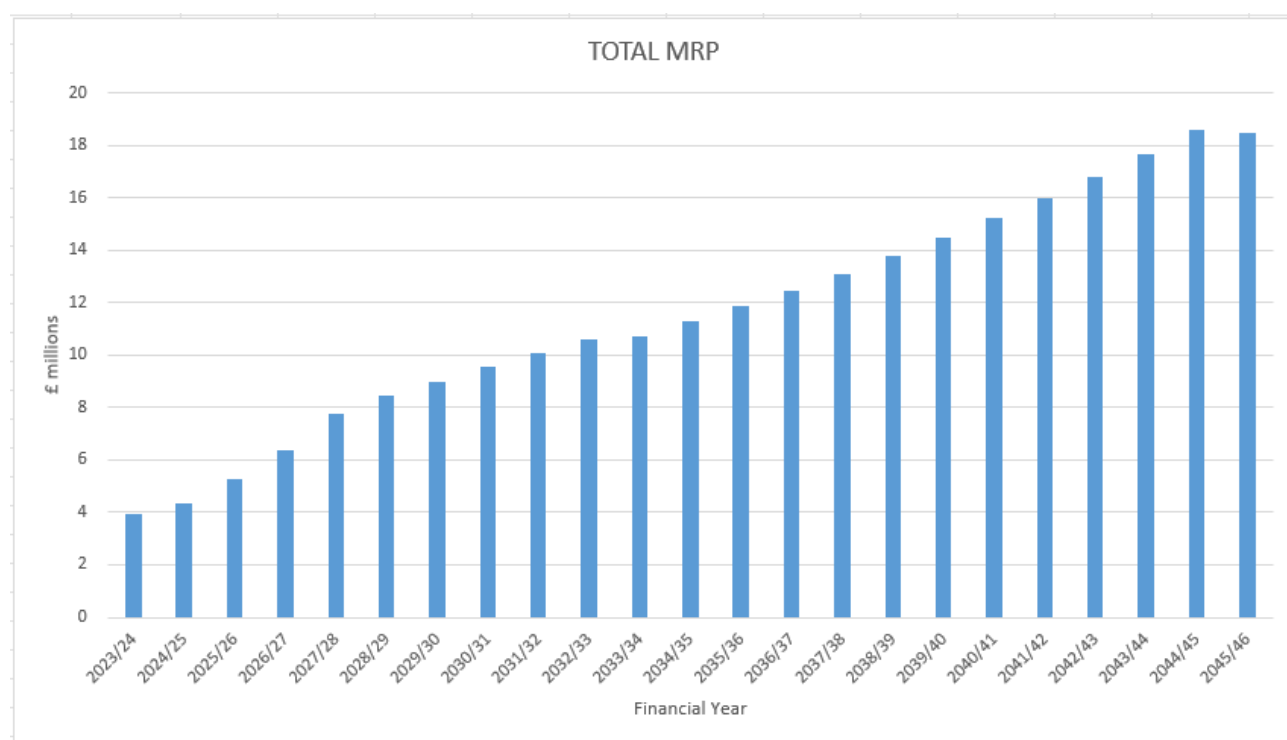
6.9 All capital projects that are council funded (as opposed to externally funded) increase the Council's CFR and it's need to borrow. The Council calculates its short term need to borrow through its cash flow forecasts but uses a sector accepted projection called the liability benchmark to forecast future borrowing requirements. This is based on the council funding required for the anticipated capital programme over the coming years, and takes into account any internal liquidity, including useable reserves, we could use before we borrow externally, and the agreed cash liquidity the council has chosen to maintain as a working capital balance (in this case, £10m). It also incorporates additional expenditure over and above available cash such as budget overspends creating EFS borrowing and DSG overspends. As you can see from the table below, the council's external debt is projected to rise to £361m by the end of 2027/28.

	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
	Actual	Projection	Projection	Projection	Projection
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Loans Capital Financing Req.	283,063	310,269	342,751	380,364	386,096
Less: Balance Sheet Resources	(51,363)	(60,334)	(48,666)	(47,966)	(34,806)
Net Loans Requirement	231,700	249,935	294,084	332,397	351,289
Preferred Year-end Position	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Liability Benchmark	241,700	259,935	304,084	342,397	361,289

6.10 MRP on council funded capital expenditure is incurred from the year after the asset is bought or created, and is charged annually over the whole life of that asset. The Council's MRP policy is calculated on an annuity basis which charges the revenue budget lower proportions at the start of the asset's life, increasing over time. Ultimately the whole capital cost of the asset will be charged to revenue but whereas the straight line method spreads this evenly over the asset life, the annuity method sees their allocation start low and increase.

6.11 This methodology was adopted relatively recently, which means that the Council's MRP on its existing assets, whilst not inconsiderable currently, is set to rise over the coming years in terms of the annual charge to the revenue budget. This is another important consideration that affects the affordability of the capital programme.

6.12 The graph below shows the forecast MRP charge to the revenue budget each year over the next 20 years of existing assets plus the current reduced capital programme for the years 2026/27 to 2029/30 that has been proposed for inclusion in the budget. The MRP charge for 2026/27 is £5.29m while the annual MRP charge to revenue by 2030/31 is £9.58m.



7 Capital Overview

7.1 The capital programme year on year has been very ambitious with typically large percentages of it being slipped annually into the following year or years and this year is no exception. At 2025/26 Q1, £16.7m of slippage was approved to be brought forward from 2024/25 into the current 2025/26 capital programme and in 2025/26 Q2, £22.5m is being slipped into 2026/27.

7.2 The Council continues to keep debt servicing costs as low as possible by short term borrowing, mainly peer to peer, with other councils. This has allowed us to have a weighted average cost of capital of 3.8% compared to the PWLB certainty rate of 5.94% on 25 year loans. The Treasury Strategy, which guides our approach to borrowing and the risk around it, mandates that no more than 30% of our portfolio should be for terms of less than one year. While the significantly lower interest rate is clearly advantageous, it also offers no hedge against unexpected rises in interest rate. Recent experience has shown that unexpected world events and changes in government policy can have quite severe impacts on interest rates and with the Council's current loan balance in excess of £260m and rising, this presents a significant risk that needs careful management to balance. At the end of 2025/26 Q2, the Council has 25.54% of its loans maturing within the next 12 months. This is within the 30% limit set out in our guidance which is approved by full Council.

7.3 The changes to the capital programme in 2025/26 Q2 are shown below. These have been reviewed and agreed by the Capital and Asset Group in the period.

Cost Centre	Project Title	Service	Council funded Request	Grant Funded requests	CIL Funded request	Total	Reasoning
85140	Shaw house improvements	Community Services	0	60,000	55,350	115,350	New project to improve visitor facilities at Shaw house incl, Bar trailer, play area & community garden
87289	Superfast Broadband Project Management	Transformation, Customer & ICT	677,540	0	0	677,540	Funding applied to Berkshire wide joint arrangement
85195	Expansion of Berkshire Records Office. Reading	Community Services	0	118,350	0	118,350	Allocation of additional external funding available towards project
83143	Canal Bank restoration	Environment	(70,380)	0	0	(70,380)	Reduction in council funded element as charged to grant instead
82361	iCollege Expansion (Parsons Down)	Education & SEND	0	91,350	0	91,350	Virement of Grant funding between education projects
82285	Highwood Copse	Education & SEND	0	(27,370)	0	(27,370)	Virement of Grant funding between education projects
82360	Satellite Network of Special Provision - Secondary Phase 1	Education & SEND	0	(63,980)	0	(63,980)	Virement of Grant funding between education projects
85125	Libraries Capital Maintenance - Improvement Works	Community Services	(41,000)	0	0	(41,000)	Closure of cost centre 85125, merged into 87500
87500	Estate - Planned Enhancements	Finance, Property & Procurement	41,000	0	0	41,000	Closure of cost centre 85125, merged into 87500
87633	CIL Community Infrastructure Funding Bids	Finance, Property & Procurement	0	0	(416,000)	(416,000)	CIL Bids cost centre change of service and budget manager £0 increase
87633	CIL Community Infrastructure Funding Bids	Development & Housing	0	0	416,000	416,000	CIL Bids cost centre change of service and budget manager £0 increase
			607,160	178,350	55,350	840,860	

7.4 Some of the key highlights from 2025/26 Q2 are detailed below:

New Projects:

- The Shaw House Improvement programme is a part Grant, part CIL funded project comprising of three elements. A bar trailer to improve the catering offering and revenue generation at Shaw House outdoor events, an outdoor adventure play area for children and a community garden at the entrance to the site to encourage more visitors.

Concluding Projects:

- The Local Authority Housing Fund project has now purchased their final property for use in housing refugees in the West Berkshire area, we have purchased 21 new properties and redeveloped West Point House into 5 apartments. The final refurbishments on 3 of these properties are planned or underway with the remainder occupied by displaced peoples.
- The Four Houses Corner project has been a long-standing project redeveloping our site for the traveller community. Electrical meters were to be installed in September 2025 with a phased return of residents from week commencing 29th September 2025 onwards. Some further costs remain including removal of protective concrete barriers and the contract retention.
- The Modular exercise studio at Hungerford Leisure Centre was completed earlier this year and is available for further exercise classes at the centre. We are awaiting final invoices from the main contractor before closing the project.
- The Northcroft Leisure Centre dry side refurbishment was completed in July 2025 and was re-opened to the public, we await final invoices from suppliers to close off this project.

Projects out to Procurement:

- The Council has received tenders during 2025/26 Q2 for the Solar PV works at the Padworth recycling site.
- The clarification period of the tender has closed on the Grazeley Solar Farm project with the full tender process completing at the end of September. An updated business case with updated income projections is being prepared by the service to ensure the project is still financially viable. This represents good governance on the part of the Service and Finance on a project this size since the initial business case was done quite some time ago.
- The Royal Berkshire Archives extension has been out to tender with the Service seeking to apply further external funding to make the contract award.

8 Conclusions

Revenue

- 8.1 The 2025/26 Q2 forecast shows a quarter on quarter weakening financial position, driven primarily by demand in ASC and CSC. Every service has been tasked to review

opportunities to reduce expenditure. Focus needs to be applied to both the red savings and transformational activities, to offset demand driven cost increases.

- 8.2 The Budget process for 2026/27 is underway with final savings proposals for Revenue being presented to the Financial Savings and Planning Board over the coming weeks.

Capital

- 8.3 Significant amounts of slippage have been moved to 2026/27. This represents the final estimation of slippage before the outturn report at the end of the current financial year as everything identified up to this point has been included in the draft programme currently under review for inclusion in the 2026/27 budget. The Services, coordinated by the Capital and Asset Group, have reviewed the whole programme (90+ projects) and made suggestions wherever possible for the reduction of Council funding. Council funded projects increase the Council's borrowing requirements, debt servicing costs and MRP impact, meaning that each year's capital expenditure is effectively split over the life of those projects and spread across the revenue budget for those years to come, with interest being added on top. The reduction of Council expenditure, shifting the focus and reliance to grant funding, CIL and S106 reduces the rising revenue pressure of the capital programme.
- 8.4 Where projects are neither essential maintenance or a statutory requirement, updated business cases are being prepared to ensure that the project, at the very least covers the cost of borrowing and MRP and, hopefully, contributes a positive impact to the revenue budget over and above that.

9 Proposals

None.

10 Other options considered

None.

11 Appendices

None.

Background Papers:

Subject to Call-In: Yes: ☐ No: ☒

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by a Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Task Group within preceding six months

☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision

☐

Report is to note only

☒

Officer details:

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Job Title: Deputy s151 Officers

Tel No: 01635 503225 and 01635 519994

Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	6 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	AnnMarie Dodds
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4745

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Ofsted visited West Berkshire's Children's Services to conduct a short ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) between 8 – 19 September 2025. The council's previous ILACS inspection occurred in March 2022. The inspection report is published by Ofsted on 28 October 2025. This report provides an overview of Ofsted's findings.
- 1.2 The Judgement from Ofsted is
 - Overall Effectiveness: Good
 - All key areas inspected were graded Good:
 - Impact of leaders on social work practice
 - Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
 - Experiences and progress of children in care
 - Experiences and progress of care leavers

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To inform the Executive of the "Good" overall effectiveness rating and commend the progress made since 2023.
- 2.2 To inform the Executive that for the continued development of children's services that Executive note the requirement for:
 - Investment in Early Help capacity to ensure timely support for families.
 - Propose a revised multi-agency Early Help strategy with clear delivery milestones.

- Targeted improvement in practice for children experiencing chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
- Standardising contingency plans across child protection and child-in-need cases.
- Continued recruitment and retention efforts.
- Twice yearly progress reports to the committee on Ofsted development progress concentrating on Early Help capacity, participation metrics and Workforce stability & caseloads.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
Financial:	There are no financial implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Human Resource:	There are no Human Resource implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Legal:	There are no Legal implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Risk Management:	There are no Risk Management implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report; the rating of good overall assists in managing the Council's corporate risk register.			
Property:	There are no Property implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
Policy:	There are no Policy implications related to the publication of the Ofsted report.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:		x		

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		
Environmental Impact:		x		
Health Impact:		x		
ICT Impact:		x		
Digital Services Impact:		x		
Council Strategy Priorities:	x			<p>The publication of this report positively impacts the following strategy priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services we are proud of • A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all • Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Core Business:	x			<p>The publication of this report positively reinforces the deliver of quality services as business as usual for Children's Services.</p>
Data Impact:		x		<p>The publication of this report has no impact on the rights of data subjects.</p>

Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Service Director for Children's Social Care</p> <p>Service Director for Education and SEND</p> <p>Lead Member for Children's Services</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 West Berkshire has made significant progress in the past year despite previous challenges linked to leadership changes and financial pressures. It was noted that prior to the change in administration, during the summer of 2023, the limited focus on and funding for children's services had resulted in a noticeable decline in the performance of children's services. Leadership is now stable and focused, resulting in improved practice and outcomes for children and families. While early help and responses to cumulative harm remain areas for development, the authority demonstrates strong commitment to continuous improvement, workforce stability, and partnership working.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 The Ofsted report covers in detail the key strengths and areas for further development across children's social care. It identifies three specific areas for improvement relating to the development of early help, the consideration of the impact of cumulative harm for children and the use of contingency planning when working with children and families.

Background

- 5.2 Key Strengths are identified throughout the services.
- 5.3 In the domain of Leadership & Governance Ofsted recognise a strong and stable leadership team since late 2023 has driven improvement. There is Increased workforce capacity and creation of new roles. There is evidence of strengthened partnership working with police, health, and most schools. The council's corporate parenting commitment evident, including reverse mentoring and plans to boost participation.
- 5.4 For children in Care permanence planning is highly effective; most children achieve stability quickly. Kinship care options are significantly improved. Foster care recruitment and retention have strengthened, fostering hubs support carers. The Adoption processes for children is timely and well-supported.
- 5.5 Care Leavers in West Berkshire have a stable, experienced team of social workers and personal advisers. The revised local offer has been co-produced with care leavers; accessible and clear. Care leavers have good access to health, education, employment, and housing support. Peer mentoring and participation forums positively impact service design.
- 5.6 Across the Safeguarding & Protection of children there are effective multi-agency responses to exploitation and extra-familial harm. Children's services provide prompt

and proportionate child protection interventions. Improved support for disabled children and young carers are recognised.

5.7 Areas for targeted Improvement are defined by Ofsted

5.8 Early Help is underdeveloped due to insufficient resources and results in delays in providing timely support.

5.9 Practice with children experiencing chronic neglect/domestic abuse needs strengthening may lead to the cumulative harm of children.

5.10 Contingency Planning with families varies and some plans lack clarity for parents.

5.11 We continue to experience workforce pressures and caseloads remain high in some areas; experience levels across the workforce are uneven.

5.12 Participation of our children and young people is limited with minimal reach of children's voice initiatives (e.g., R:Vue council).

5.13 System & Processes are impacted by the current case recording system which is inflexible.

Proposals

5.14 It is proposed that Children's Services' development plan aligns the with the widescale transformation activity delivering the Families First Reform in West Berkshire. This will achieve a single plan of development and transformation activity. The Ofsted specific developments are

5.15 Strengthen Early Help Provision

- Action: Develop and implement a fully resourced Early Help strategy with clear timelines.
- Why: Current capacity is insufficient, causing delays in support and prolonged statutory involvement.
- Next Step: Secure additional funding and workforce; formalize multi-agency contributions.

5.16 Improve Practice for Children Experiencing Cumulative Harm

- Action: Introduce targeted training and tools for identifying and responding to chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
- Why: A small but significant number of children remain in harmful situations for too long.
- Next Step: Embed use of chronologies and escalation protocols; monitor impact through audits.

5.17 Enhance Contingency Planning

- Action: Standardize contingency planning templates and guidance for child protection and child-in-need plans.
- Why: Current variability risks unclear expectations for families.
- Next Step: Include contingency planning in supervision audits and performance dashboards.

5.18 Reduce Caseloads and Build Workforce Expertise

- Action: Continue recruitment drive and accelerate induction for new staff
- Why: High caseloads and uneven experience levels affect timeliness and quality.
- Next Step: Expand assistant team manager roles and mentoring schemes; monitor caseload distribution monthly.

5.19 Upgrade Case Management System – In delivery

- Next Step: Engage frontline staff in design/testing; ensure training plan is ready by Q1 2026.

5.20 Expand Participation and Voice of Children

- Action: Strengthen R:Vue council and participation officer roles. (This is the participation group led by and for our children in care to ensure the voices of our children are represented)
- Why: Current reach is limited; children's voices need greater influence.
- Next Step: Launch engagement campaign; set measurable targets for participation.

5.21 Embed Practice Model and Continuous Learning

- Action: Ensure consistent application of the chosen practice model across all services.
- Why: Variability remains despite progress.
- Next Step: Use audit findings to target coaching; integrate model into performance reviews.

6 Other options considered

6.1 No other options are considered.

7 Conclusion

7.1 For children's services to continue to develop it is essential that the recommendations from this Ofsted inspection inform next steps to ensure children in West Berkshire are appropriately supported and cared for to achieve their best outcomes.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Final report

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees or associated Task Groups within the preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All

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Inspection of West Berkshire local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 September 2025

Lead inspector: Rodica Cobarzan, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of children care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Since the previous inspection in 2022, there have been changes in the local authority's corporate, political and children's services senior leadership. These changes in 2023, compounded by financial pressures and insufficient strategic and political focus on children's services, had acted as a brake on progress and led to the quality of services in some areas of practice declining. The appointment of a director of children's services at the end of 2023, replacing the previous combined role of director of children's and adults' services, along with the establishment of a strong and stable leadership team, have acted as a catalyst for the local authority to refocus on delivering high-quality services for children and families. This is also leading to strengthening focus on implementing the social care reforms. Progress has been made in improving kinship care options for children, but in other areas, such as family help, implementation of the reform is at an early stage.

This reinvigorated focus on getting the right support for children has led to strengthened practice in several areas, including the multi-agency 'front door', work to tackle extra-familial harm and permanence planning. For a very small number of children experiencing the cumulative impact of neglect or domestic abuse, their needs are not always recognised or acted on quickly enough. In other areas, such as early help, plans are promising but are at too early a stage to demonstrate a sustained impact for children and families.

What needs to improve?¹

- The effectiveness of practice with children who may be experiencing cumulative harm from neglect and/or domestic abuse, including those subject to the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. (Outcome 1, national framework)
- The consistency of contingency planning for children being supported through child protection and child-in-need plans. (Outcome 3, national framework)
- The pace of work by the local authority, together with its partner agencies, to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to provide timely and effective early help to all children and families who need it. (Outcome 1, national framework)

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good

1. Early help for children and families is underdeveloped because there is not currently sufficient resource to meet need, which means that not all children receive support as early as they could. When children do receive early help, they benefit from effective services. When concerns for children who are open to early help escalate, they are swiftly stepped up for a statutory assessment. But when children could step down from assessments, there is insufficient resource to provide them with ongoing targeted family support from the early help team. This means that for some children, they receive statutory support for longer than they may need. Leaders are aware of this shortfall and are working with partner agencies to develop a new strategy and to increase the capacity for support.
2. When children are referred to the Contact, Advice and Assessment Service (CAAS), they receive a prompt and effective service. Thresholds are well understood and consistently applied. There is careful consideration of children's experiences, including the impact of domestic abuse, which is well understood. Workers engage well with families to explain how and why information about their children is shared, including when it is necessary to do this without their agreement. Management oversight is sound, with very clear direction and rationale for decision-making.
3. Children and families receive a swift response when concerns are raised outside of the normal working hours. The team takes appropriate actions to safeguard children, and there is proactive information-sharing between the daytime and emergency duty social workers.
4. Arrangements to manage allegations against adults who work with children are effective. The local authority designated officer (LADO) ensures that a prompt

¹ The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

and comprehensive response is taken to allegations and that safeguarding children is always paramount.

5. Most assessments are thorough, consider each child individually and are informed by a broad range of partnership information. Children's and parents' views inform the findings from assessments. Most children and families receive appropriate and effective support during the assessments, which results in their circumstances improving or starting to improve.
6. The quality and effectiveness of support and safeguarding for disabled children has improved notably. This means that disabled children are now better supported by workers who generally know them well and understand their needs. They receive a range of effective services and packages of support that help children make progress.
7. Children at risk of exploitation benefit from a strong and coordinated multi-agency response. Regular meetings are held to analyse data and information, mapping risks and patterns that can help professionals take swift actions. Children who go missing are offered return home conversations, and efforts are consistently made to get alongside children to build relationships and understand why they went missing. This means that many children are well supported through this work.
8. The number of children identified as young carers has increased significantly, due to improved identification processes. However, a small number of children are still awaiting an assessment due to limited capacity. The accessibility of support varies slightly across the local area, which means that some young carers struggle to attend or fully engage with the support.
9. Visits to children are regular and include both announced and unannounced visits. Most visits are purposeful, and social workers have meaningful conversations with children to understand their wishes and feelings. For most children, these relationships are often strengthened through a range of direct work that takes place in the family home or school, and this provides valuable insights for assessment and planning.
10. When there are potential risks of significant harm, child protection strategy meetings are held promptly, with attendance from appropriate partner agencies. Interim safety plans are put in place to address children's immediate safety, and children are seen without delay. Child protection enquiries build on information shared at strategy meetings, with information from family members adding additional insight. Enquiries are timely, child focused and lead to proportionate actions. This includes progression to child protection conferences, when necessary.
11. Children's family networks are explored during social work interventions. Some children and families are not offered a family network meeting when this would have been appropriate. This means they may miss out on benefiting from a

structured support plan involving their kinship and wider support network, which could have helped to facilitate progress. Leaders have a plan to extend the offer, and training provided to staff to support this is underway.

12. Most initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) are held within statutory timescales and are effective. Review child protection conferences, core groups and child-in-need meetings are regular and well attended. Decisions made in meetings are appropriate, and, for most children, the assessment of risk is based on accurate evidence about parents' ability to make and sustain change.
13. Most child-in-need and child protection plans are well written, have timescales and are appropriate and proportionate to children's needs. Children receive the right support, under the right plan. However, contingency plans vary in quality, with some not sufficiently detailed to enable parents to understand what would happen should change not be secured.
14. A very small, but significant, number of children have been the subject of statutory interventions for very lengthy periods, due to neglect or domestic abuse, but without their lives improving. Chronologies are not always used well enough as a tool to identify the impact of cumulative harm over time. As a result, interventions do not always start early enough and are sometimes over-optimistic, resulting in delay for these few children. Positively, more recent practice is stronger and shows improvement in the accurate and timely identification of the cumulative negative impact on children of living with chronic neglect or domestic abuse. Managers have better oversight of child protection planning, which has contributed to a reduction in the number of children remaining on child protection plans for extended periods.
15. When risks to children escalate, most children appropriately enter the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. Letters given to parents are clear and clarify concerns and support well. Managers and leaders oversee children in pre-proceedings. However, despite this level of oversight, a very small number of children have not benefited from swift or effective work, meaning that they have been in pre-proceedings for a prolonged period. As a result, positive changes for those children have not been achieved quickly enough.
16. There is a child-focused response to 16- and 17-year-old children who present as homeless. These children receive effective support, either through coming into care, if this is appropriate, or through support as children in need.
17. Privately fostered children are visited and arrangements assessed appropriately. There is an ongoing programme of awareness raising with partner agencies because the current number of identified privately fostered children is very low.
18. Effective systems are in place to ensure that children who are home educated are safeguarded. The local authority's oversight of children who are missing education is appropriate. Action is taken to help them re-engage in education as soon as possible.

19. Social workers generally benefit from regular management oversight and supervision. This helps them to reflect on and develop the effectiveness of their practice and to progress plans for children.

The experiences and progress of children in care: good

20. When children come into care, it is for the right reasons. For many, their entry into care is planned and at a time that is right for them. However, some children enter care too late, or in an unplanned way. This means that for these children, the initial stages of coming into care can be unsettling. However, support is provided to help them settle in their new homes.
21. Permanence planning is very effective, with managers closely monitoring children's plans for permanence in its different forms from the moment they come in to care. There is an appropriate emphasis on keeping brothers and sisters together whenever possible. Social workers consider all permanence options for children and progress parallel and triple plans effectively until they identify what the right plan is for each individual child. This means that once children come into care, they almost all move to stable homes that meet their needs well and do so in a timely manner.
22. Leaders have created the right support structures for social workers to explore kinship care options for children. As a result, a high number of children achieve permanence by living in kinship arrangements. Children who cannot safely remain within their family and friends' network, and have a permanence plan of long-term fostering, are promptly and appropriately matched with their long-term carers so that they have certainty about their future care arrangements.
23. When children return to the care of their parents, assessments are completed and support provided. Care orders are discharged when it is appropriate to do so. Consequently, children are not subject to ongoing statutory involvement for any longer than they need to be.
24. A very small number of children live in unlawful, unregistered children's homes. These children are placed as a last resort and moved to suitable registered provision as soon as possible. Social workers regularly visit them to monitor their welfare and safety. Senior leaders have robust oversight of these children.
25. Children in care benefit from having consistent social workers who visit them regularly, spend time alone with them and know them well. Social workers are skilled in building relationships with children, enabling them to have a trusted adult with whom they can share their worries and aspirations. Assessments of children's needs are regularly updated to include their lived experiences and changing needs.
26. A range of direct work tools are used to ascertain children's views and to explore their understanding of their experiences. Not all children living in long-term foster care have the benefit of life-story work to provide them with a clear

and accurate narrative of their life experiences and help them to celebrate their journeys.

27. Children's plans are regularly considered through statutory reviews, chaired by independent reviewing officers (IROs) who are consistent people in children's lives. IROs write sensitively to children following reviews, informing them of what was agreed in the meetings. They escalate any concerns on behalf of children promptly if progress against plans is not being made. This helps to ensure that agreed actions are taken in agreed timescales and that children always remain at the centre of decision-making.
28. Children's written plans are sometimes very lengthy, including those plans for disabled children. This makes it harder for children to understand exactly who will be doing what and when for them so that their needs are met.
29. Children benefit from spending time with those who are important to them, in line with their wishes and an analysis of risk. Social workers and carers support children in care to participate in a range of enriching leisure and social activities that match their interests. Talents are nurtured, and children are supported to have fun.
30. Children are supported to progress and to achieve well educationally. The virtual school knows its children well and is unrelenting in its ambition for children in care to receive the best support. Staff balance promoting children's well-being with prioritising their educational achievement. The virtual school works positively with both schools and social workers. This includes providing useful training for designated teachers to help them to understand their responsibilities. This support is beginning to have a positive impact on children's attendance and academic progress.
31. Children's health needs are prioritised, with initial and review health assessments or tuberculosis screening happening on time for most children. Children access child and adolescent mental health services with minimal delay, and, for those children who have a specific need that cannot be met by universal health services, privately sourced therapeutic support is provided.
32. Disabled children in care benefit from consistent social workers who know them well and who regularly seek their wishes and feelings through children's preferred individual communication styles. Children make good progress in their homes.
33. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers help and support these children well in all aspects of their lives. As a result, they have positive experiences.
34. Children in care who are at risk of exploitation or other forms of extra-familial harm benefit from a strong, multi-agency response to both review the level of potential risk and to agree joint actions to reduce risk and disrupt the activities

of exploiters. Consequently, this means that for most children in care, risks are well managed and understood, and children are safer.

35. Fostering panels are effective and support the recruitment and retention of foster carers well. Most children in care benefit from living in good-quality, stable foster homes, where they are well cared for. Whenever possible, children live locally with foster carers, who have been well trained and well supported, including through the fostering hubs. The local authority has successfully recruited additional foster carers. They have also strengthened retention, which is an indication of the high quality of support provided to carers.
36. Children live with adopters who meet their needs. There is a strong partnership between the regional adoption agency and the local authority that supports planning for children. When adoption is the right permanence plan for children, this is achieved in a timely way. Adopters receive effective support during the adoption process and subsequently.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

37. Care leavers benefit from a stable and experienced team of social workers and personal advisers (PAs). Most young people are introduced to their PAs early enough for them to develop a relationship before PAs take over from social workers as the key person providing support to them.
38. Most care leavers have positive and productive relationships with their PAs. PAs speak with empathy and warmth about their care leavers and recognise the unique challenges they face. Equally, the care leavers inspectors met with are positive about their relationships with their PAs and the impact they have on their lives. Care leavers are visited in accordance with their needs.
39. The health needs of care leavers, including emotional and mental health needs, are regularly reviewed and promoted. PAs support care leavers to manage their own health needs, ensuring that they have access to their health information and are registered with the relevant services. PAs are proactively referred to specialist services when necessary. For some care leavers with acute or specific health needs, the local authority has mitigated deficits in health services by funding private therapy or counselling to support these young people.
40. PAs encourage care leavers to lead fit and active lives, with many being supported to access sports and other activities in line with their interests. The 16+ service facilitates a series of creative and purposeful workshops such as music, drama and cooking, which have a positive impact on young people's lives.
41. Care leavers can share their views about the effectiveness of the support they receive and how services should be shaped going forwards through their access to the 'R:Vue' forum and 'community club'. These groups have had some impact in shaping discrete areas of practice across the service. The peer

mentoring scheme is highly valued by those delivering and receiving mentorship.

42. The local offer has been revised and co-produced with care leavers. It is presented in a format which is clear and accessible. Most care leavers are aware of their rights and entitlements. They are supported by PAs in securing relevant documents to help them transition to independence. Care leavers know how to make a complaint, and when this happens, staff are receptive and committed to learning from the experience.
43. Young people over the age of 21 who want or need ongoing support continue to have good access to this from their PAs. They know how to reach out, and when they want help or advice, PAs are responsive, and their work is impactful.
44. Pathway plans are completed in partnership with young people. Plans are mostly focused on key issues and identified needs. Actions are appropriate and most have clear review dates. While there is some variability in the quality of written records, including how effectively PAs evidence their high aspirations for care leavers, most pathway plans are being used well to support young people to make progress.
45. The response to care leavers who were former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children is strong. Skilled PAs support young people with culturally matched mentoring schemes, to benefit from purposeful and engaging activities and to access education, and with community integration. While PAs understand and promote the identity needs of care leavers, these are not often explicitly recorded in pathway plans. These plans therefore do not always fully reflect the positive work completed by PAs.
46. Care leavers in custody receive regular, purposeful support from their PAs, including support to plan their return to the community and maintain links with their families and friendship networks.
47. Most care leavers who are young parents are well supported. They receive appropriate emotional and practical support from their PAs and via the young parent group. One young person inspectors met spoke about the positive and profound impact her PA's support had on her life.
48. Care leavers have access to support from a broad range of services, and professionals maintain frequent contact with them to help them to make safer choices and to navigate the risks and challenges of adult life. For most, risks are closely monitored, and when risks increase, responses are swift and effective. A small number of young people with complex risks are not as robustly supported into adulthood.
49. Most care leavers are successfully engaged in education, employment or training. Strong partnership working and personalised guidance raise the aspirations of care leavers. This empowers them to develop confidence and skills to access purposeful work and educational opportunities. The local

authority successfully engages a range of agencies to help young people to prepare for adulthood.

50. Almost all care leavers live in suitable accommodation that is safe and meets their needs. Most care leavers receive tailored tenancy support, which ensures a successful transition into independent living. Similarly, care leavers who want to live with their foster carers are supported to remain in stable 'staying put' arrangements for as long as they want or need. Strong and purposeful relationships with their carers result in supportive, lifelong relationships.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: good

51. West Berkshire's leaders have made children a high priority. This commitment has accelerated over the past 12 months, with increased workforce capacity, including the creation of new roles, to support social work practice. Action was also taken to address the absence of a sufficiency strategy to ensure that there are the right number and range of homes and foster carers for children who need them. This includes ongoing work with the Regional Care Cooperative, fostering hubs and the local authority's own fostering service to improve the council's ability to support children to remain within their communities. As a result, children are now benefiting from an increase in the range of homes for both children in care and care leavers.
52. Strengthened partnership relationships are now evident at all levels. Managers from key partner agencies, including the police and health services, consistently attend both strategic and operational decision-making forums, contributing to effective joint working. Partnership working is strong with most, but not all, schools, and some challenges remain in ensuring that inclusion is promoted effectively in every school.
53. Leaders are engaged and active corporate parents. A very small number of children in care and care leavers take part in the 'R:Vue' council, and, through this, they help to inform the Corporate Parenting Board's agenda. However, the influence and reach of this group is currently limited. Leaders recognise this and have plans to strengthen participation, including the recently agreed additional two participation officers. Senior leaders, including the chief executive, have also become directly involved in 'reverse mentoring' with children in care and care leavers. This provides meaningful opportunities for children's and young people's voices to be heard at the highest level in the council, with an impact already being noticeable.
54. There is ongoing work to embed the local authority's chosen model of practice across all services. The model is being applied increasingly consistently, resulting in more children and families receiving effective and relationship-based support in line with the local authority's aspirations.

55. A broad range of audit activity is now being undertaken. Learning from this is resulting in improvements in practice, although not always within the timescales that would achieve the most benefit to children and families.
56. The local authority's existing case recording and management system has proven unwieldy and inflexible and has not best supported social work practice. It is positive that leaders have recognised this and have a plan in place to implement a new system in spring 2026 aimed at strengthening case recording.
57. The local authority's ongoing efforts to improve the stability and capacity of the workforce are being successful. There has been a significant reduction in both turnover and reliance on agency staff and an improvement in the percentage of staff who are permanent. This has been supported by the very recent introduction of additional assistant team managers. While workforce stability has improved overall, there are still some areas where the level of experience of staff is limited, and this impacts on the allocation of more complex work. Nevertheless, progress over the past year has been both steady and significant, reflecting a clear and increasingly successful commitment to strengthening the workforce and improving outcomes for children and families.
58. While there is some variation across teams and services, caseloads for some practitioners remain high. Leaders are acutely aware of this and have plans in place to further increase staffing and so reduce caseloads. However, the current workloads of some staff are limiting the timeliness and quality of support they are able to provide to some children and families.
59. Staff are encouraged and supported to develop their careers in West Berkshire. There are numerous opportunities for all staff to enhance their knowledge, skills and practice so that they are well equipped to support children and families that require help, including through an academy that supports the learning and development needs of social workers, particularly those who are newly qualified.
60. Leaders have ensured that supervision is taking place regularly across most areas of the service. Children's progress is mostly well documented, and actions arising from supervision are clearly recorded. Supervision helps social workers and PAs to reflect on their practice with children and maintain a focus on their experiences.
61. The workforce within children's services is well supported. There are staff engagement forums, a positive management culture with an accessible and visible wider leadership team and there is a strong commitment from staff, many of whom told inspectors that they enjoy working for West Berkshire.

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Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	6 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Nigel Foot
Report Author:	Elaine Cox/Paul Hendry
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4700

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To request that members adopt the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the Act) places a statutory duty on the Council to produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for its area.
- 1.3 This report presents to members the Draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) for West Berkshire, which sets the management and improvement agenda for the Countryside service's rights of way work over the next 10 years.
- 1.4 A ROWIP Delivery Plan will be produced, which will detail specific targets arising from the ROWIP actions. It is intended that these targets - based on customer need, available resources and linked to the Council Strategy - will be presented to the relevant Portfolio Holder for consideration and agreement in each financial year.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the adoption and publication of the ROWIP. The ROWIP has been compiled using the results of extensive public consultation and gathering of evidence.
- 2.2 To agree that the Countryside service will produce, annually, actionable targets within the ROWIP Delivery Plan. The ROWIP Delivery Plan will set out SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) targets for management activities in the years ahead, and that this Delivery Plan will be agreed with the relevant Portfolio Holder on an annual basis.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
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Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Financial:	The emphasis of the ROWIP is on taking new approaches to rights of way programmes and working more closely with partners, communities and parishes. In the main, the ROWIP is to be delivered using the existing Countryside budgets both revenue and capital. Should any Delivery Plan target require additional funding then officers will bring forward a funding request to Asset and Capital Group.			
Human Resource:	None at this stage. However, there could be implications in future years, depending on the agreed targets within the ROWIP Delivery Plan.			
Legal:	Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires the Council to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This legislation requires the Council to review the plan every ten years. There is forthcoming Definitive Map legislation which may influence the ROWIP and the annual ROWIP Delivery Plan and therefore demand for legal support will have to be prioritised in the light of wider service demands.			
Risk Management:	Stakeholder expectations will be managed by officers in order to address any reputational risk. The ROWIP is based on extensive public consultation and therefore helps to focus resources more effectively. Existing resources dictate what the ROWIP seeks to deliver so the targets set out in the ROWIP Delivery Plan will be ambitious but realistic.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	The ROWIP is a strategy document and as such it refers to all other relevant Council policies in the text of the main ROWIP document.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			See attached EIA
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		See the attached EIA.
Environmental Impact:	X			The ROWIP includes a number of actions to improve biodiversity and active travel. These will be further reflected in the draft ROWIP Delivery Plan.
Health Impact:	X			The ROWIP includes a number of actions to improve active travel and outdoor recreation. These will be further reflected in the draft ROWIP Delivery Plan.
ICT Impact:	X			The ROWIP includes some actions to improve interactive mapping. These will be further reflected in the draft ROWIP Delivery Plan.
Digital Services Impact:	X			Some actions of the ROWIP involve improved digital solutions and those will be further reflected in the draft ROWIP Delivery Plan.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			Targets in the draft ROWIP Delivery Plan will make reference to the Council Strategy and so will be aligned.
Core Business:	X			All targets are consistent with the Council's priorities.

Data Impact:		X		None.
Consultation and Engagement:	The ROWIP has been produced following an initial engagement exercise, and a statutory public consultation on the draft Plan. The results of the statutory consultation, and the Council's responses, are appended. There were over 1,500 responses to the public consultation.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 Every local Highway Authority must, under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, produce a ROWIP. This sets out a council's strategic goals and priorities for public rights of way. ROWIPs must be reviewed every ten years, and this is West Berkshire's second ROWIP. The previous 10-year ROWIP was reviewed after extensive engagement with stakeholders and the public, and a thorough review of evidence. This report brings to the Executive the final draft ROWIP 2025 - 2035 for consideration and, all being well, obtaining approval for its adoption and publication.
- 4.2 Legislation demands that the ROWIP must go further than meeting basic legal duties. It must fully consider the needs of the wider public and not just those who already use public rights of way. It must assess how public rights of way meet those needs, now and in the future. The Plan must include a statement of action, which in this case comprises the ROWIP actions and the SMART targets arising from them in an annual Delivery Plan. Essentially the ROWIP is aspirational, setting broad objectives whilst it is the Delivery Plan which sets out measured targets on an annual basis.
- 4.3 There were over 1,500 responses to the ROWIP consultation questionnaire, illustrating significant public enthusiasm. The district's 1,100km of public rights of way are highly valued by communities and extensively used for improving health, wellbeing and quality of life as well as providing the potential for excellent off-road sustainable transport links. The wide range of responses received has helped officers to draw up actions needed across the network, for instance:
- the promotion of rights of way;
 - identifying local access needs and implementing physical improvements;
 - the creation of accessible routes and the removal of barriers to access for all;
 - embracing local volunteer resources;
 - environmental enhancements in accordance with the declared ecologic emergency; and
 - and closer engagement with landowners and other partners to understand better how to work to mutual benefit.
- 4.4 The report summarises the content of the ROWIP and explains the ROWIP process. A separate supporting information pack has been submitted with this report and includes documentation such as the evidence reports, and the results of the public consultation with officer responses.

- 4.5 It is recommended that members approve the ROWIP and agree that an annual ROWIP Delivery Plan is brought forward, with SMART targets against the ROWIP actions, for approval by the relevant Portfolio Holder. The annual SMART targets will be compiled after full consideration of available resources. A draft of targets for Year 1 is attached at Appendix H.
- 4.6 It should be noted that the ROWIP is the outcome of extensive consultation and research. The success of the ROWIP will be measured against the achievements of the annual targets set out in the Delivery Plan. To this end a progress report will be provided to the Portfolio Member and Local Access Forum and on an annual basis.
- 4.7 Listed below are key changes which will have taken place at the 10-year conclusion of this ROWIP:
- Greater engagement with landowners, parishes and internal WBC colleagues to progress the priorities of the ROWIP;
 - Priority PROWs to be clear of vegetation and all adequately signposted, some with destinations;
 - SMART targets achieved for resolving unsatisfactory structures, including for equestrians, and for improving structures to increase accessibility;
 - All open access land signed, with easy-access points;
 - The public habitually using a wider PROW network than just popular 'honeypot' sites;
 - PROW structures and surfaces resilient to climate change;
 - Environmental sustainability built into procurement, and all PROW work, e.g. surfacing, drainage and vegetation clearances;
 - PROWs used more widely for short journeys;
 - Strategic traffic-free links created for all PROW users;
 - Creation of easy-access routes around populous areas;
 - Publication of PROWs with easy access;
 - An understanding of the needs of all types of disabilities and steps taken to meet these needs in access improvements;
 - A minimum of 100 stiles replaced with easy-access gaps or gates;
 - A minimum of 50 structures upgraded to improve accessibility;
 - A minimum of 50 new accessible routes provided, with at least 10 on the scale of a capital project;
 - A minimum of 30 promotional items released;
 - The Countryside Code disseminated more widely to encourage responsible use of the countryside; and
 - The volunteer scheme expanded, and a voluntary support officer sought.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report brings to Executive the final draft ROWIP for adoption and publication. The ROWIP is the result of extensive consultation and sets to the actions which the council and the Countryside Service should strive to achieve over the next 10 years.

- 5.2 All the supporting documentation to this report has been enclosed separately.
- 5.3 A short summary of the ROWIP (Appendix G ROWIP Executive Summary) is also available in the supporting information pack.

Background

- 5.4 Public rights of way are an important asset for West Berkshire. They enable people to access and enjoy the outstanding countryside and natural areas of the district, as well as being important for health, mental wellbeing, travel and the local economy. In urban areas, they provide networks of mobility and interaction for people at the community level, helping to reduce reliance on motorised transport. In the rural context, they define access to the countryside, critically linked to recreation and tourism, as well as providing mobility networks for local residents and visitors.
- 5.5 West Berkshire's network of public rights of way comprises public footpaths, bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. They are all public highways, with a total network length of 1,192 km (741 miles), which is comparable to the length of the road network, this being 1,280km.
- 5.6 A Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a statutory document created by local authorities to outline strategies for enhancing and managing public access routes, such as footpaths, bridleways, and cycle paths, within their area, considering the needs of different users and aiming to improve the overall quality of the network for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and others with mobility needs. It typically includes assessments of the current network, identified areas for improvement, and proposed actions to address these identified improvements. The ROWIP is informed by and supports the delivery of many of West Berkshire Council's strategies, these links are detailed in the ROWIP document.
- 5.7 The compilation of this ROWIP has followed all relevant formal guidance. The overall process was as follows:
- 5.8 A public engagement between April 2021 and September 2022. The results are set out in the Evidence Report 2 – Surveys and Stakeholders (Appendix E). The consultation took the form of:
- an online public and parish council survey;
 - a landowner survey;
 - interviews with a wide range of stakeholders (including those living with mobility impairments) i.e., the Local Access Forum, the tourism and active travel sectors and a wide range of users and volunteers; and
 - engagement with elected councillors.
- 5.9 Consultation took place during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. 2021/22), during which use of green spaces and the countryside increased, providing special insight into the use of public rights of way during this time. The online public survey attracted over 1,500 responses.

- 5.10 An evidence review of all relevant rights of way documentation is set out in the Evidence Report 1 – Network and Needs Analysis (Appendix D) and has been provided in the separate supporting information pack. This is a study detailing the nature of the WBC rights of way resource, the condition of the rights of way network, the demographic profile and health needs of residents of West Berkshire, the needs of users of public rights of way, the wider context (such as the climate, economy and transport), and the policy context for the ROWIP.
- 5.11 Formal statutory consultation on the draft ROWIP, which took place between 31st August 2023 and 23rd November 2023. The responses are set out in the Collation of Responses (Appendix F) in the supporting information pack, together with our comments as to whether they have influenced the final draft ROWIP. Note that generally there was a high level of agreement with the initial broad objectives of the draft ROWIP included within the consultation documentation.
- 5.12 Several headline themes came out of the public consultation such as:
- Public rights of way are highly valued and are an important part of everyday life and widely used for improving health and wellbeing and quality of life;
 - Protecting public rights of way affected by development and maintaining and investing in the current network were viewed as the highest overall priorities for the Public Rights of Way service;
 - Developing new partnerships could help to develop and deliver initiatives and to ensure the public rights of way network adapts to meet future needs of all West Berkshire residents;
 - There appeared to be generally good public awareness that West Berkshire Council is responsible for public rights of way, but less clarity around how problems should be reported;
 - Most people had encountered a problem on a public right of way, with overgrown paths and surface issues the most common problems;
 - West Berkshire Council's online 'Report a Problem' function was well-used by the public, who were generally satisfied with the service;
 - There were high levels of satisfaction in how West Berkshire Council responded to reported problems;
 - The Kennet and Avon Canal and the Ridgeway long distance routes were popular, but there was low awareness and usage of routes promoted by West Berkshire Council;
 - There is demand for information on public rights of way and where to go. It is less clear how this should be provided and the role of West Berkshire Council in information provision;
 - Specific types of users considered they were under-represented in terms of promotional material and wanted more routes and promotion – including for equestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicle users; and
 - There are some tensions arising from the use of public rights of way but there is a strong desire to improve responsible enjoyment of the countryside.
- 5.13 The ROWIP takes full account of these responses in its actions. These include actions marked as 'Business as Usual', which are elements which arose from the consultation which can be seen as broad principles to be applied to relevant work going forward. Through the annual Delivery Plan we will identify and prioritise

specific targets for improvements to the network over the next ten years. Other responses were considered to form part of normal core work and will be addressed directly through current service processes.

- 5.14 The annual draft Delivery Plan will set out the recommended targets arising out of the ROWIP actions. Officers will bring forward annual SMART targets, for approval by the relevant portfolio member. These targets will be ambitious but will take into account available resources.
- 5.15 The annual Delivery Plan targets, based on consultation outcomes, will include items such as the following:
- Revise our priorities for maintenance and improvement works;
 - Work more closely with landowners and other partners to understand better how to target work to maximum benefit;
 - Improve environmental sustainability of PROW works and plan environmental enhancements;
 - Seek opportunities to increase traffic-free routes and general connectivity for all users;
 - Create and publicise new accessible routes every year;
 - Regularly publicise aspects of the PROW network, especially where improvements have been made, to encourage wider use;
 - Remove restrictive barriers and upgrade structures every year;
 - Improve mapping to show infrastructure, routes, public transport and other information to support all users to make route choices; and
 - Seek a Volunteer Support Officer to expand volunteering and community action on the PROW network.

Proposals

- 5.16 It is proposed that the Draft ROWIP is approved for adoption. The ROWIP is a statutory document and sets the broad objectives for rights of way improvements over the next 10 years.
- 5.17 It is proposed that the process for setting annual ROWIP Delivery Plan targets is approved, i.e. the production of annual SMART targets which take account of public need and expectation addressed through the consultation, and taking account of available resources, both staffing and budgetary. An annual progress report will form part of the delivery planning process; this will be presented to the Portfolio Holder and the Local Access Forum (LAF).
- 5.18 The ROWIP is seen as a mechanism for focussing and prioritising current resources both capital and revenue. Consequently, Service efforts will be focussed on those maintenance and improvement projects which are most valued by the public. If specific projects require additional resources, then these projects will be presented to the Capital Strategy Group as a distinct project for approval.

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 No other options may be considered because a ROWIP is a statutory requirement under The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and therefore councils are

required to provide a plan and Delivery Plan for their area. ROWIPs must be reviewed every 10 years.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 An extensive public consultation process was carried out on the Council's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan. 1,500 public and stakeholder responses have been taken into consideration and have helped to shape the final Plan recommended here for adoption. Officers consider that adoption and publication is appropriate because its preparation has been a transparent process informed by this extensive public consultation and research.
- 7.2 The Plan will be supported by an annual ROWIP Delivery Plan, which takes account of public need, with targets against the ROWIP actions. It is essential that the targets are based on SMART objectives and take account of available resources. These Delivery Plan targets will be brought forward annually for consideration and approval by the relevant Portfolio Member. Progress on the Delivery Plan targets will be reviewed annually and a progress report prepared for presentation to the Portfolio Holder and Local Access Forum.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One
- 8.3 Appendix C – Draft ROWIP
- 8.4 Appendix G – Executive Summary
- 8.5 Appendix H – Draft Delivery Plan with Year 1 targets
- 8.6 The following appendices can be found in the separately enclosed supporting information pack:
- Appendix D – Evidence Report 1 – Network and Needs Analysis
- Appendix E – Evidence Report 2 – Surveys and Stakeholders
- Appendix F – Collation of responses and officer responses

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wards affected: All Wards

Officer details:

Name: Elaine Cox
Job Title: Senior Rights of Way Officer
Tel No: 01635 519069
E-mail: Elaine.Cox@westberks.gov.uk

West Berkshire Council
Equity Impact Assessment

September 2025

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Environment Department, Countryside Service
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Adoption of an updated Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2025 – 2035.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Renewal of an existing plan. Please see the next section.
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	<p>Every local authority which is responsible for public rights of way must produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It sets out the Council's strategic goals and priorities for public rights of way. Rights of Way Improvement Plans must be reviewed every ten years, and this is West Berkshire's second ROWIP.</p> <p>Rights of Way Improvement Plans must carry out a full assessment of the needs of the public in using public rights of way, now and in the future. The ROWIP must assess how well the public rights of way network meets these needs and set out a statement of action.</p> <p>The Policy aims to improve equality of access; indeed, this is one of its major functions and so will not have any detrimental impact on equalities.</p>
Completed By	Elaine Cox, Senior Rights of Way Officer
Authorised By	Paul Hendry, Countryside Manager
Date of Assessment	15 October 2025

Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p>Context / Background</p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>The council has a statutory duty to produce a Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This sets out the Council's strategic goals and priorities for public rights of way. ROWIPs must be reviewed every ten years, and this is West Berkshire's second ROWIP. The previous 10-year ROWIP was reviewed after extensive engagement with stakeholders and the public, and a thorough review of evidence. This Plan is the result of over 1,500 consultation responses and many of these deal specifically with equality of access. The annual ROWIP Delivery Plan will set out targets for improving access for all members of the community.</p>
<p>Proposals</p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>The ROWIP has the following over-arching objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase levels of physical activity 2. Improving quality of life 3. Supporting physical and mental health, and tackling health inequalities and improving health outcomes 4. Increasing active travel 5. Climate change mitigation and adaptation 6. Improving West Berkshire's environment and green infrastructure 7. A strong economy, respecting the environment and improving outcomes for all. 8. Involving and empowering local people 9. Effective and efficient delivery of Council services <p>These proposals and objectives are based on extensive user and community feedback arising out of the consultation exercise carried out prior to finalising the draft plan under consideration.</p>
<p>Evidence / Intelligence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public rights of way are highly valued and are an important part of everyday life and widely used for improving health and wellbeing and quality of life

Equity Impact Assessment

<p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting public rights of way affected by development and maintaining and investing in the current network were viewed as the highest overall priorities for the Public Rights of Way Service • Developing new partnerships could help to develop and deliver initiatives and to ensure the public rights of way network adapts to meet future needs of all West Berkshire residents • There appeared to be generally good public awareness that West Berkshire Council is responsible for public rights of way, but less clarity around how problems should be reported • Most people had encountered a problem on a public right of way, with overgrown paths and surface issues the most common problems • West Berkshire Council's online 'Report a Problem' function was well-used by the public, who were generally satisfied with the service • There were high levels of satisfaction in how West Berkshire Council responded to reported problems • The Kennet and Avon Canal and the Ridgeway long distance routes were popular, but there was low awareness and usage of routes promoted by West Berkshire Council • There is demand for information on public rights of way and where to go. It is less clear how this should be provided and the role of West Berkshire Council in information provision • Specific types of users considered they were under-represented in terms of promotional material and wanted more routes and promotion – including for equestrians, cyclists and motorised vehicle users • There are some tensions arising from the use of public rights of way but there is a strong desire to improve responsible enjoyment of the countryside
<p>Alternatives considered / rejected</p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p>A ROWIP is a statutory requirement under The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and therefore councils are required to provide a plan and Delivery Plan for their area. ROWIPs must be reviewed every 10 years.</p>

Equity Impact Assessment

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Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The younger and older age range groups who are less likely to access the countryside will benefit from specific targets in the Delivery Plan.			
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The ROWIP sets out how barriers to access will be overcome.			
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			

Equity Impact Assessment

Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	In West Berkshire there is a lower than the South East average of residents of non-White ethnicity. Organisations representing minority ethnic groups were consulted during the information-gathering phase of the ROWIP and the findings included in the actions around increasing awareness of public rights of way.			
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	It is not considered that the impacts of the ROWIP on persons with this protected characteristic will differ in any way from other interested parties.			

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The majority of WBC rights of way are in rural communities. The ROWIP seeks to improve rural rights of way as sustainable transport links and routes to and from local amenities.			
Areas of deprivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteering on rights of way presents opportunities for skills development in displaced and deprived communities			
Displaced communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteering on rights of way presents opportunities for skills development in displaced and deprived communities			
Care experienced people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	Not applicable
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix B

Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for certain projects that have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.

Should you require additional guidance in completing this assessment, please refer to the Information Management Officer via dp@westberks.gov.uk

Directorate:	Place
Service:	Environment
Team:	Countryside (Public Rights of Way)
Lead Officer:	Elaine Cox
Title of Project/System:	West Berkshire Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Date of Assessment:	15/10/25

Do you need to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

	Yes	No
Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data? <i>Note – sensitive personal data is described as “data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person’s sex life or sexual orientation”</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be processing data on a large scale? <i>Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension? <i>Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will any decisions be automated? <i>Note – does your system or process involve circumstances where an individual’s input is “scored” or assessed without intervention/review/checking by a human being? Will there be any “profiling” of data subjects?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Yes	No
Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<small>Note – this could include biometrics, “internet of things” connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised</small>		

If you answer “Yes” to any of the above, you will probably need to complete [Data Protection Impact Assessment - Stage Two](#). If you are unsure, please consult with the Information Management Officer before proceeding.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 – 2035

Final September 2025



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL



Foreword



Councillor Nigel Foot
Portfolio Holder for Culture,
Leisure, Sport and Countryside
West Berkshire Council

As Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside, I am pleased to present West Berkshire Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan. This document outlines our shared strategic vision for a more accessible, sustainable and inclusive public rights of way network—one that supports the health,

mobility, and wellbeing of all who live in, work in, or visit our district.

West Berkshire boasts over 740 miles of public rights of way, connecting our towns, villages, and countryside. These routes are not only vital for recreation and tourism but also play a growing role in sustainable transport and climate resilience. This strategy has been informed by extensive consultation with residents, landowners, user groups, and statutory partners. With over 1500 responses, it is clear how important public rights of way are to the public in West Berkshire.

Our survey revealed that 91% of people responding used public rights of way once a week or more frequently, and 40% used them every day. People value the network for many and varied reasons, including for health, relaxation, exploring nature, and engaging in hobbies and as safe off-road links. Public rights of way also play a significant role in West Berkshire's visitor economy.

Public rights of way are rooted in and valued by communities, and we will take steps to involve communities and other groups much more in the work that we do. With this improved dialogue, we can target our efforts in relevant ways, and invite communities to assist us to achieve some of the goals. We will seek to improve the accessibility of the network for people with mobility impairments of all kinds, through engaging with these groups much more than before. We also recognise the importance of education and engagement—encouraging responsible use and fostering a shared sense of stewardship.

There are actions to prioritise surface improvements and vegetation clearances more effectively, and to publicise aspects of the rights of way network and countryside in more imaginative and helpful ways. The 'green lane' routes of the network, many ancient in origin, preserve features of historical and ecological value, amongst many other aspects of interest. In an era of concern about the environment, the ROWIP seeks to protect and enhance these precious qualities.

This ROWIP is set in the context of currently available resources but is aspirational and seeks to add value by working with others. Its delivery will contribute significantly to making West Berkshire a great place to live

As we move forward, we must also be realistic about the challenges. Budgetary pressures, climate impacts, and competing land uses require us to be strategic, transparent, and community-focused in our approach. But with a clear plan and strong partnerships, we are confident in our ability to deliver meaningful improvements.

Our rights of way are not just paths through the countryside—they are pathways to wellbeing, sustainability, community and the natural environment. This strategy sets out a bold and practical vision to protect and enhance this vital network for everyone who lives in, works in, or visits West Berkshire.

I invite you to explore this strategy and join us in delivering its ambitions. Whether you are a seasoned rambler, a local landowner, or someone discovering these routes for the first time, your voice and your support are essential to making this plan a success.

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West Berkshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Every local highway authority must, by law, produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). This is a council's strategic document setting out its goals and priorities for public rights of way. ROWIPs must be reviewed every ten years. This is West Berkshire's second ROWIP.

Assessment of Needs

To produce a ROWIP, an assessment of the needs of the public in using public rights of way must be carried out, considering use now and in the future.

The assessment must fully consider the wider public and not just those who already use public rights of way. It must assess how public rights of way can encourage exercise and recreation and support use by those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems. It must also set out a statement of action.

In reviewing West Berkshire's ROWIP a new assessment of evidence was carried out. The views of the public and a wide range of stakeholders were gathered. Stakeholder engagement undertaken included:

- **Online Public Survey**- carried out between March and May 2021 and receiving over 1500 responses;
- **Parish and Town Council Survey**- 42% of parish and town councils completed a survey between March and May 2021.
- **Elected Councillors** - West Berkshire Councillors were sent a briefing and invited to complete the public survey.
- **Landowner Survey** - an online survey for landowners was distributed by the National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association

- **Stakeholders** - 66 stakeholder organisations were contacted, including user and interest groups and community organisations.
- **Local Access Forum (LAF)** – The LAF was briefed on the ROWIP at all regular meetings. All West Berkshire LAF members were invited to comment, and dedicated meetings were held.

An analysis of West Berkshire's public rights of way was carried out and an extensive evidence base was reviewed. The findings are set out in two evidence reports:

- **Evidence Report 1** – Network and Needs Analysis; and
- **Evidence Report 2** – Surveys and Stakeholders Report.

About this Report

The ROWIP is set out in four themes:

- **Theme 1: Looking after Public Rights of Way**
- **Theme 2: An Evolving Network**
- **Theme 3: Healthy and Prosperous Communities**
- **Theme 4: Effective Delivery**

Priorities and Actions

There are 10 priorities for the ROWIP. Under these priorities there are 46 actions .

Summary – Main Findings and Priorities

Below are the main areas the ROWIP aims to address. These are based on what the public and stakeholders said were important and what research has revealed.

The public said that the maintenance of public rights of way is their highest priority.

Residents of West Berkshire highly value their public rights of way. They are one of the most used public assets with 91% of people using them once a week or more often. Maintaining public rights of way so that they are easy to use was the public's highest priority. They wanted paths to be clear of vegetation, structures to be in good condition and paths well signed. Landowners are key partners in this, and the council will provide support and advice to them.

The priority which delivers this is:

Theme 1 Priority 1: To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.

The second highest priority for the public was protecting existing public rights of way.

Of particular concern were negative impacts associated with development. The public wanted good outcomes from development and improvements to be secured, with new and improved routes created for a wide range of users.

The council also carries out important legal work which protects public rights of way.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Theme 2 Priority 5: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement.

Public rights of way are important for health and wellbeing. People value them highly and say they improve their quality of life. However, not everyone has the same opportunity to use and benefit from them.

Three quarters of the public said they use public rights of way to improve their health. However, disabled people, those in poorer health, younger people and those of 'non-White' ethnicity use public rights of way less. Improving the condition and accessibility of public rights of way will help more people to access them, including disabled people. More and good quality information is also important.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Theme 3 Priority 6: Improve the accessibility of public rights of way so that more people can use them for enjoyment, health and mental wellbeing.

Theme 3 Priority 7: Improve information provision to enable more people to use public rights of way, support the economy and reduce conflicts.

There is wide variation in the provision of public rights of way in different parts of the district. Some of the most populated areas have fewer and disconnected routes.

The difference of provision means that not everyone has the same opportunities. There are more people, fewer and more disconnected public rights of way, more traffic and poorer health outcomes in the eastern Kennet Valley and south of the district compared to the north. This has an impact on public rights of way users. Going forward, the council will need to consider how to address these inequalities.

Equestrians and cyclists in particular have to use roads to connect their journeys, especially in the parts of the district where there is more traffic.

The priorities which deliver this:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Environmental sustainability, protecting the natural world and adapting to climate change are important in a changing world.

Sustainability and protecting the outstanding natural assets of the district are important priorities. Also important is responding to climate change and the effects it will have on public rights of way. Public rights of way also have a role to play in supporting people to make sustainable travel choices.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 1 Priority 2: To improve environmental sustainability of public rights of way maintenance and contribute to environmental and climate stewardship.

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

The ROWIP is ambitious. To deliver it fully will need allocation of resources, new ways of working and linking with partners with common goals.

The consultation process engaged with many organisations. Some of these were existing partners, but many were new. There was interest in working together to maximise opportunities. The existing volunteer group already delivers valuable work but there is more that can be achieved. There are also opportunities to work in partnership with parish and town councils.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 4 Priority 8: Ensure that this ROWIP is resourced and delivered, and that progress is monitored and the plan reviewed.

Theme 4 Priority 9: Increase involvement and working with partners, communities and volunteers.

Theme 4 Priority 10: To continue to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and seek ways to improve.

Delivery, Monitoring and Review

The actions in this ROWIP go beyond what is required by law for maintaining public rights of way. Some aspects of the ROWIP may be delivered using existing resources and workstreams, but additional funding will be needed to deliver many of the actions. The resources required to deliver each action are indicated in the action tables for each Theme. The following table provides an indicative guide to the resourcing required and whether the action can be delivered with current funding levels.

Key to Action Tables - Resourcing

Core business
This action covers existing core business of the Public Rights of Way Service. The action will drive improvement in delivery. Likely to be deliverable within current financial resources but delivery will be reduced if less resource is available.
£
Partially deliverable with current financial resources but additional resources will be needed to fully deliver this action.
££ - £££
Some progress may be possible but increased resources will be needed. This will be significant in some cases.

More detailed targets, based on the high-level actions in this plan, will be put forward in a Delivery Plan. These targets will be formed by reviewing the current delivery of actions, available resources and priorities. The Local Access Forum will be involved in the process of formulating the Delivery Plans.

Whilst it is not foreseen that there will be a need for a full review of this ROWIP within its ten-year timeframe, at year five the ROWIP will be assessed to ensure it continues to align with West Berkshire’s priorities and takes into account any new information. A full review will take place after ten years to assess whether the ROWIP still fulfils the purpose required and will be amended as necessary.

Access in West Berkshire

Public Rights of Way

A public right of way (PROW) is a public highway. In law, a PROW is part of, and connects with, the wider highway network. Although they are mainly in the countryside, there are public rights of way in towns and villages too. There are four types of public right of way

Public footpaths – a public right of way only for pedestrians (including dog walkers, users of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and people with buggies);

Public bridleways – As per public footpaths, and in addition can be used by horse riders and cyclists;

Restricted byways – As per public footpaths and bridleways, and in addition can be used by horse-drawn carriage drivers;

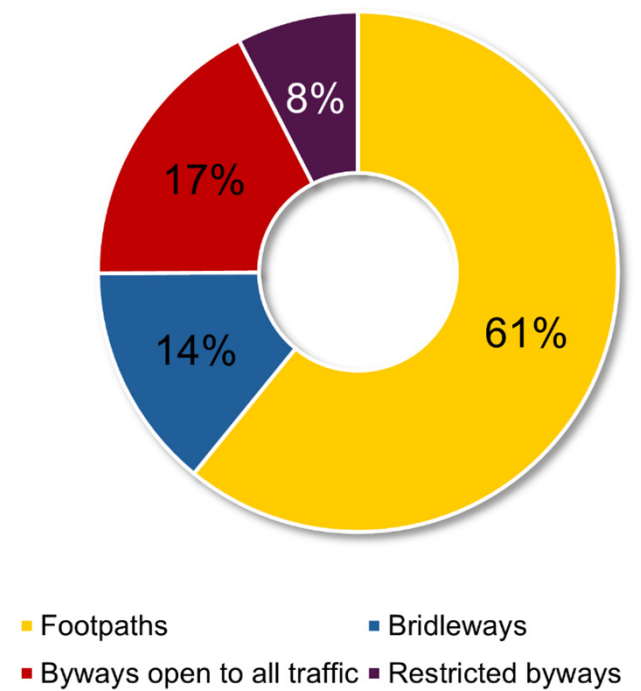
Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATs) – a public right of way for all users, including motor vehicles.

All public rights of way together are called ‘the public rights of way network’. The length of the public rights of way network is comparable with the road network. A map of the network can be found by selecting Layers/Countryside/Public Rights of Way on this map: <https://gis2.westberks.gov.uk/webapps/OnlineMap/>

There are also some paths which are allowed by landowners but are not public rights of way, known as permissive paths. They can improve the connectivity of the PROW network.

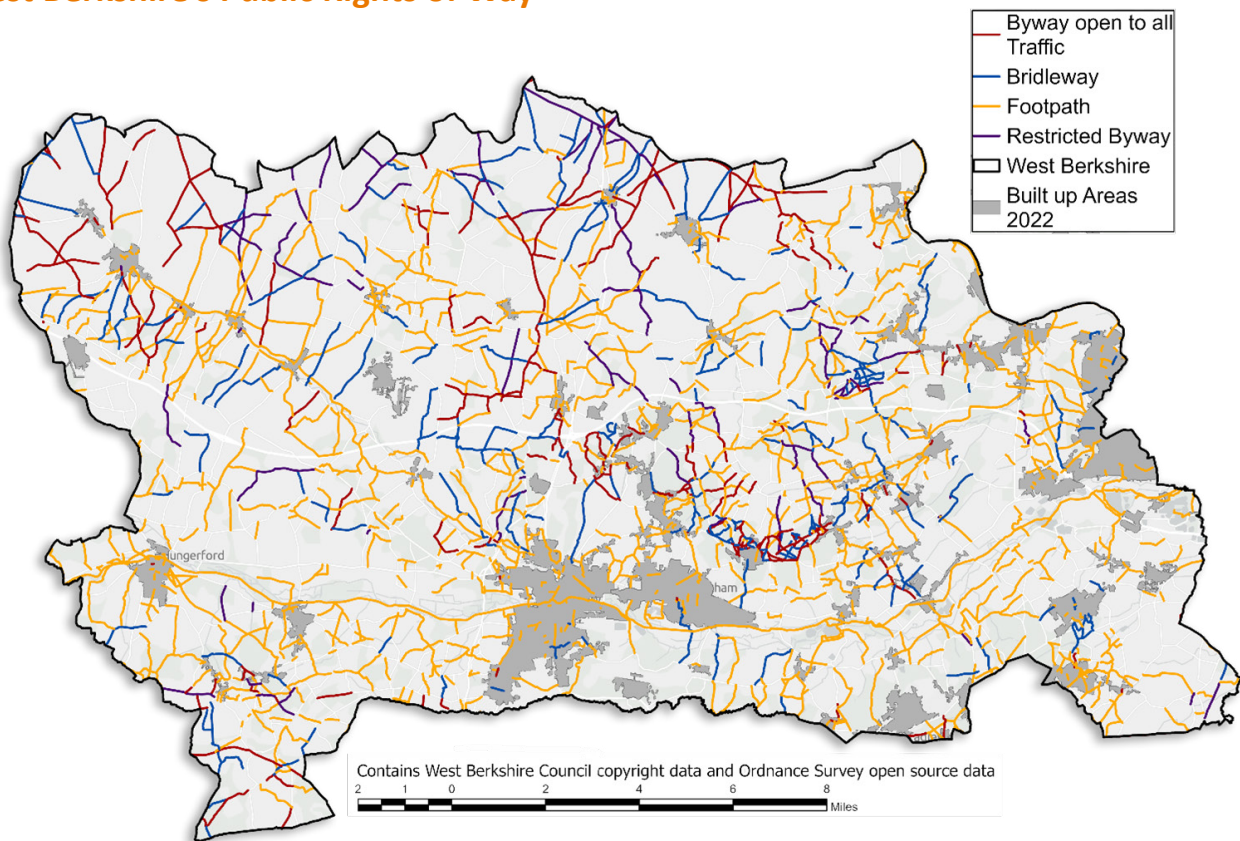
Parts of The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails pass through West Berkshire.

West Berkshire’s Public Rights of Way

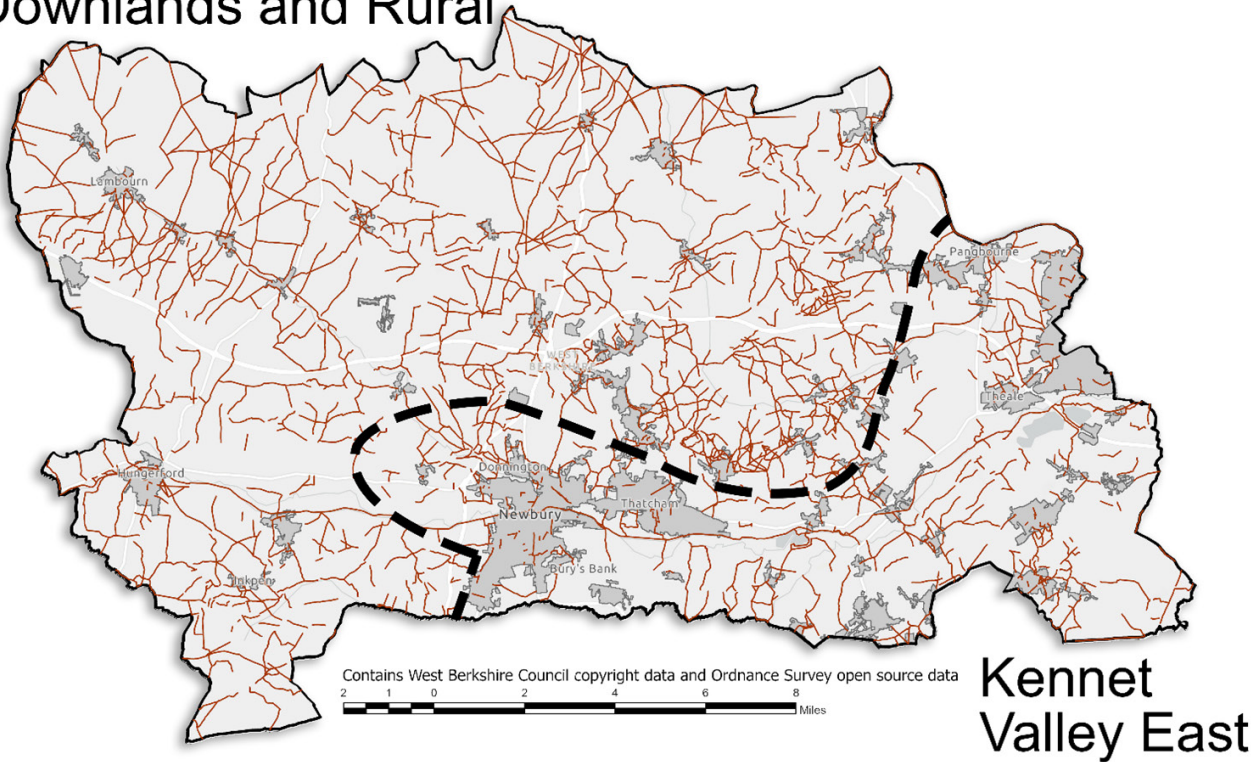


	KM	Miles	%
Length all PROW	1192	740	100%
Footpaths	725	451	61%
Byways open to all traffic	167	104	14%
Bridleways	209	130	18%
Restricted byways	91	56	7%
Average density	1.69km per square km		
Average metres of PROW per person	7.5m		

West Berkshire's Public Rights of Way



Downlands and Rural



Kennet Valley East

The density of public rights of way varies across West Berkshire. The lowest provision of public rights of way per person is in the main urban areas in Newbury, the eastern Kennet Valley, and the outskirts of Reading within West Berkshire. Those areas with a lower length of public rights of way per person potentially have more people using each route, or more ‘traffic’ and demand on the routes.

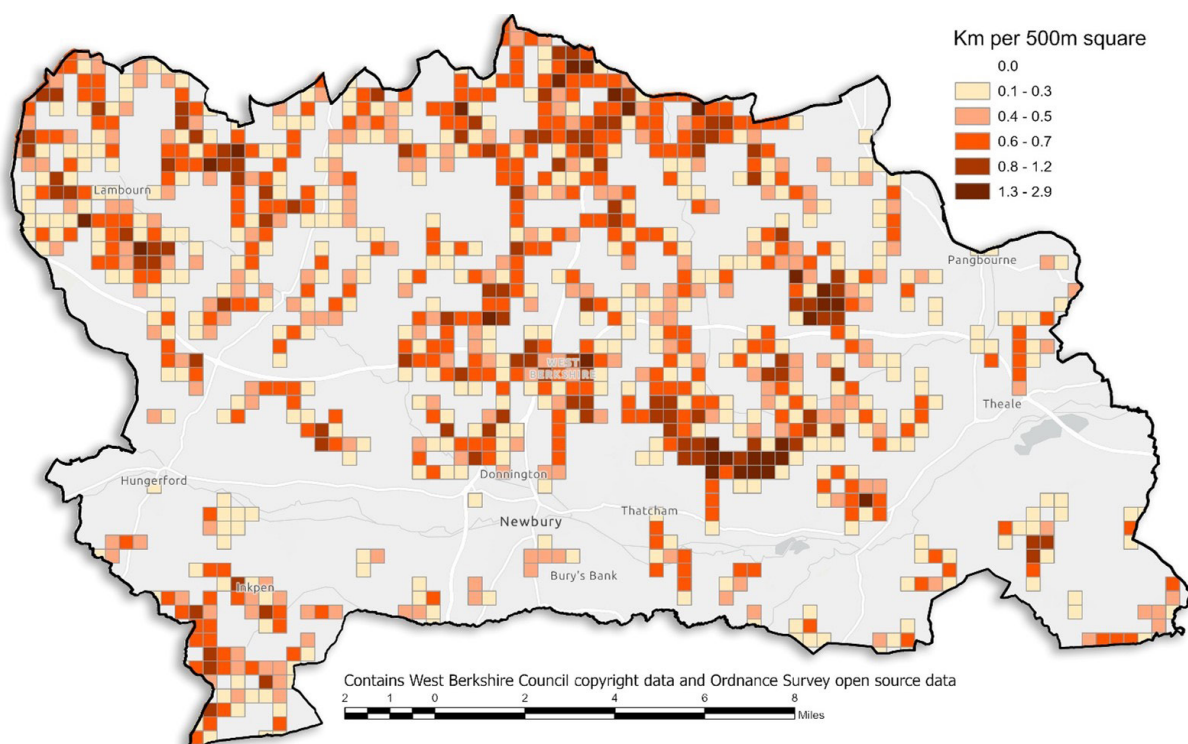
The network of bridleways, restricted byways and byways is also not evenly spread across West Berkshire. Whilst, overall, 39% of the network is made up of these types of routes, in the lower populated Ridgeway and Lambourn Wards, these types of public rights of way form over 50% of the network. There are fewer in the higher-populated Kennet Valley and urban areas and they often do not connect well. In Newbury Central, Newbury Clay Hill, Thatcham West, Theale and Tilehurst South and Holybrook Wards there are none of these types of public rights of way.

This is important, because equestrians, cyclists, carriage drivers and motorised vehicle users are not permitted to use public footpaths and the roads are busy in these parts of the district.

There are also busy major roads, such as the M4, A4 and A34 which cause breaks in public rights of way. This creates barriers to all users, but especially equestrians.

All of these factors have an impact on public right of way users.

Distribution of Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways Open to All Traffic



Green Spaces

There are several popular countryside sites. Whilst they are outside the scope of the ROWIP, public rights of way often cross them.

West Berkshire's only country park is Snelsmore Common. Greenham and Crookham Commons are also large publicly accessible areas. All of these are Sites of Special Scientific Interest where recreation needs to be balanced with protecting nature.

Other registered commons which are publicly accessible by walkers, and sometimes by cycles and with horses, include Hungerford Common, Bucklebury

Common, Padworth Common and Wokefield Common, amongst others.

The Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham, a former gravel pit, offers the chance to see wildfowl and other wildlife, with a café and playground.

The Kennet and Avon Canal is a popular recreational route, with sections forming part of National Cycle Route NC4.

The public have a right of access on foot to land that is recorded as Access Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. In West Berkshire, this includes most Registered Commons.

Public Rights of Way Users

Walkers

From the 2021 survey for this ROWIP:

- **99% of people walked; and**
- **58% walked without a dog, and 41% walked with a dog.**

Sport England's Active Lives Survey (2021) showed that 90% of people in West Berkshire walked for leisure in the past year and that walking is increasing.

There are six Ramblers' Association groups in and around West Berkshire and several independent walking groups.

Increasing walking is an effective and low-cost way of increasing physical activity.

Issues affecting walkers are disconnected routes, traffic, lack of information and the condition of the paths.



Cross-field footpath through crops

Cyclists

From the survey:

- **25% of people cycled, either on a cycle path or off-road (mountain-biking).**

Cycling is popular and a wide range of people take part. Public rights of way provide traffic-free routes, which are preferred by inexperienced riders, children and family groups, as well as popularly termed 'mountain bikers'.

Cycling is only allowed on bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. There are more of these in the north and east of the district and around Bucklebury and Hermitage. There is also a network of cycle routes, mainly in urban areas, for active travel. These are not usually public rights of way but add to routes where people can cycle.



Off-road cycling, Bucklebury Common

National Cycle Route 4 follows the Kennet Valley with much of this route traffic-free. The sections following the towpath are particularly popular.

Issues affecting cyclists are disconnected routes, increases in road traffic and inconsiderate drivers, lack of information, difficulties on shared use paths and surfaces.

Equestrians

From the survey:

- **10% of people rode horses; and**
- **1% drove horses with carriages.**

Recreational equestrianism includes horse riding (hacking) and carriage driving. Horse activities engage a high proportion of people with disabilities, women participants and participants over the age of 45.

In 2021 there were an estimated 8,719 equine passports registered in postcodes covering West Berkshire, which is above the national average. Using a conservative estimate, this equates to a £43m annual contribution to the economy.

Horse riders are only allowed on bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic. These are not evenly distributed across the district with more in the north and fewer in the south. The Kennet Valley has fewer public rights of way available for equestrians along its entire length and there are no routes at all running east to west along the valley. Roads therefore need to be used to form riding routes, but these are often busy. Routes are also disconnected where they cross busy roads, such as the A4, A34 and M4.

“Need safer routes for horse riders. When we have to use the roads it’s terrifying. People drive so fast. They just don’t think about what they may meet around the next bend”

Respondent to 2021 survey



Carriage-Driving

Issues affecting equestrians are disconnected routes, surfaces which are not suitable, poor quality equestrian gates, issues with other users causing distress to horses, e.g. dogs off lead, motorbikes, increases in road traffic and cars travelling too fast, lack of information.

Motorised Vehicles

From the survey:

- **5% used a motorised vehicle on the public rights of way network.**

Mechanically-propelled vehicle users can only use byways open to all traffic. These are concentrated in the northern and central downland areas, particularly around Lambourn, as well as Hermitage and Bucklebury.

Some users belong to the Green Lane Association, LARA (Land Access and Recreation Association), the All Wheel Drive Club and the Trail Riders Fellowship (TRF). Some of these organisations have local groups in West Berkshire. LARA, the TRF and The Ridgeway National Trail have produced good practice guides.

As well as benefits of social connection, enjoyment, challenge, and getting out into the countryside, motorised vehicle use enables those with reduced mobility to access the countryside to benefit their physical and mental health.

“I enjoy being in the fresh air meeting and greeting fellow users with a friendly response. I am 86 and disabled. I find riding my little motorcycle a joy and a reason to live, cannot walk 50 yards without discomfort. I make it my aim to put all other users at ease. My open face helmet helps people to see me better! I like seeing their faces when I tell them I’m 86!”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Vehicles on public rights of way can damage surfaces, which can make it difficult for others to use the route. Sometimes there is major or deliberate damage. Driving without due care and attention or damaging the surface is an offence.

West Berkshire Council's Public Rights of Way Vehicle Maintenance Policy sets out the approach to managing damage by motorised vehicles. Information, codes of conduct, liaison with user groups, monitoring and repair of priority routes are tried first to resolve issues. If these are not successful Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) may be made to protect the route. There are some permanent TROs and others which close routes over the winter months. There are TROs on parts of The Ridgeway National Trail.

In the public survey concerns were raised by other users over deterioration of surfaces, intimidating behaviour and presence on paths that motorists were not entitled to use. Conversely, there were comments made from motorised vehicle users about intimidating behaviour towards them from other users and challenges over their right to legitimately use byways open to all traffic.

Issues affecting motorised vehicle users are lack of information, challenges from other users, lack of routes they can use in some areas and the condition of the paths.



Motorcyclists on a downland byway

Disabled People

Disability covers a wide range of conditions, including mobility difficulties, visual impairment, learning difficulties, neurological problems and mental health problems.

20% of people in the 2021 Census, identified themselves as being disabled. Whilst this had not changed significantly from the last Census, West Berkshire has more older people which will lead to an increase in the number of disabled people.

Disabled people and groups were consulted for the ROWIP. They related a range of barriers which deter or prevent disabled people from using public rights of way:

- Physical barriers, such as steps, steep gradients, stiles and gates;
- Lack of accessible information;
- Lack of accessible toilets;
- Lack of confidence, not feeling welcome, fear over safety or getting lost;
- Lack of convenient and accessible public transport; and
- Lack of places to rest or shelter.

“My husband is unable to come with me due to climbing stiles. He is disabled and unable to climb. Accessibility is of high importance to me.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Minority Ethnic Groups

National research shows that people from Black and minority ethnic population are less likely to spend time in nature than the total population.

97% of people answering the 2021 ROWIP survey were White or White British, compared to 92% overall in the West Berkshire population (2021 Census). This means that other ethnic groups were less represented than in the wider population.

An interview was held with Community United in developing the ROWIP and opportunities to increase engagement with minority ethnic communities through this and other organisations was discussed.

Theme 1: Looking After Public Rights of Way



Introduction

West Berkshire's public rights of way are in high demand. The condition of public rights of way has a direct impact on the enjoyment of their many users. Most resources are therefore devoted to maintaining public rights of way to as high a standard as possible and to ensure public safety.

Maintaining Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way are public highways and, with few exceptions, are publicly maintainable. West Berkshire Council is obliged under law to maintain public rights of way to a standard that meets the requirements of the ordinary traffic of the area at all times of year.

There are many thousands of structures on public rights of way, as well as surfaces which need to be maintained and vegetation which needs to be cleared.

Maintenance responsibilities are split between the council and landowners, with whom West Berkshire works in partnership. A summary is shown in the table below, but this is not exhaustive. There is more information on maintenance on West Berkshire Council's website.

A summary of types of furniture and structures is shown in the next table, along with their condition.

Some Public Rights of Way Maintenance Responsibilities

Council responsibilities	Landowner responsibilities
Keep the surface fit for public use.	Reinstating and clearing paths crossing arable land.
Clearing surface vegetation.	Cutting back trees or hedges overhanging the path.
Make sure obstructions are removed.	Keeping the route clear of obstructions.
Maintain steps and some bridges.	Not ploughing or cropping field edge paths.
Contribute to landowner costs for replacing gates and stiles for controlling livestock.	Installing and maintaining gates and stiles for controlling livestock.
Signs where a public right of way leaves the road and waymarking along the route where needed.	Provide bridges if the need arises from the action of a landowner, e.g. widening a ditch.



A damaged byway in Enborne

Condition Survey

A condition survey of all public rights of way was carried out in 2022. A summary of the main types of furniture and structures

Summary of Infrastructure and Condition - 2022 Survey

	Total	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Steps	129	53%	47%
Sign at Road	1781	82%	18%
Sign not Road	1103	68%	32%
Waymarkers	1139	84%	16%
Bridge	707	90%	10%
Stile	533	27%	73%
Gate	1592	76%	24%

Management Priorities

The council receives around 350 reports of problems on public rights of way every year.

West Berkshire Council currently prioritises these problems with those needing urgent attention for health and safety reasons the highest priority. Other reports are prioritised based on factors such as usage, inconvenience to the public, level of complaint, public benefit, cost effectiveness and potential for deterioration.

West Berkshire Council is working towards a more strategic approach to maintenance and improvements which will also take into account the priorities identified in this ROWIP. For example, improvements in accessibility could be prioritised around urban areas or where there is higher demand. This includes working with parish and town councils and others to identify priorities consistent with West Berkshire Council's priorities and this ROWIP.

Vegetation

Overgrown paths reduce the pleasure and ease of use of public rights of way. Overgrown paths were the most frequently encountered problem. 54% of people said they had experienced this, with the issue the highest concern for parish and town councils.

Keeping paths clear is a challenge faced every growing season. Surface vegetation is the responsibility of the council but vegetation overhanging the public right of way, and crops, are the responsibility of the landowner.

The council implements an annual vegetation clearance schedule covering routes to school and its promoted recreational routes. It also responds to reports of issues. The council will review the annual clearance schedule to ensure that the highest priority routes are included. Cost-effective ways of managing vegetation will be explored, including working with landowners and parish councils. Consideration will be made to the conservation of biodiversity and habitats in implementing vegetation management.

Signs and Waymarking

West Berkshire Council is responsible for ensuring there is a signpost where a public right of way leaves a hard surfaced road. The council may also place waymarker signs along the path to help people to follow the route.

The 2022 survey recorded 1,463 signposts next to roads, 746 other signs and 959 other waymarking signs.

The repair and replacement of signposts and waymarkers takes place during the winter when less vegetation clearance takes place. When roadside fingerposts are replaced, the council will consider adding the destination of the path.

Bridges

There is a wide range of bridges on public rights of way, ranging from simple timber bridges to complex, large span structures. West Berkshire Council maintains most bridges which are crossed

by public rights of way. The 2022 condition survey recorded 707 bridges, with 90% in satisfactory condition.

All bridges are inspected for safety on a rolling programme and any defects scheduled for repair. When replacing bridges, wherever possible, accessibility will be improved through, for example, increasing widths on footpath bridges, installing ramps and providing handrails.

Stiles, Gates and Gaps

Stiles are allowed where they are needed to control livestock. Landowners are responsible for maintaining stiles.

Stiles create difficulties for less mobile people or, if poorly constructed, able-bodied. Through consulting with stakeholders it is clear that reducing the number of stiles was a high priority for disabled people. In the public survey, 31% of all users had encountered a stile in poor condition.

Overall, there was a reduction of stiles between the 2009 and 2022 condition surveys and an increase in gates and gaps where there is no structure at all. The volunteer maintenance group has replaced at least 200 stiles with gates since 2009.



Volunteers celebrating installation of 300th gate

West Berkshire Council will continue to prioritise the removal of stiles and replacement of these with gates or gaps. Paths around urban areas and villages will be a priority.

Gates can also create difficulties and hazards for both horse and rider if they are in poor repair or do not meet recommended standards. The condition survey of 2022 showed that while only 7% of gates were unusable or unsatisfactory, 22% could be improved to make them easier to use. Where funding allows, the council will make sure any existing equestrian gates conform to the British Standard (currently BS5709:2018).

Path Surfaces

West Berkshire Council is responsible for the surface of public rights of way. Surface condition was an area of concern for both the public and parish and town.

The council should ensure the surface is in a fit state for public use, for the purpose it is used for. The council does this in line with the rural nature of most public rights of way and most are unsurfaced, which is usually suitable for users. Surfacing may not be necessary or appropriate in many countryside settings and other measures, such as drainage improvements, can resolve issues.

If the route is surfaced, care needs to be taken to ensure the surface is suitable for all users. Hard surfacing is, for example, more often needed for routes used for walking or cycling to work or school. However, whilst cyclists prefer hard surfaces, horse riders prefer more forgiving surfaces, and tarmac can be slippery for hooves.

Surface condition can also be adversely affected by use. This is particularly true in West Berkshire which has a higher than average proportion of byways open to all traffic, which can be used by motor vehicles (see Evidence Report 1).

Maintaining the surface of these public rights of way can be very costly, because a new more durable surface is often needed. In some cases the byway must be closed, usually over the winter months, to prevent unacceptable damage. A list of permanently or seasonally closed byways is listed on West Berkshire Council's website.

Ploughing and Cropping

Paths crossing arable fields should not be ploughed but, if this can't be avoided, the landowner must make sure the path is levelled and clearly marked within two weeks. The public right of way must also be kept clear through the crop. Rights of way following the edge of a field (headland) must not be ploughed under any circumstances.

The council works in co-operation with landowners to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities. Landowners are regularly contacted to remind them of their legal duties regarding paths over cropped land. Improved information recording has helped to target potential problems in advance

Working with Landowners

Landowners and managers are vital partners in the maintenance of public rights of way. In the survey for this ROWIP, all landowners who responded thought that the public rights of way on their land made a positive contribution to their local community.

To help landowners, West Berkshire Council provides advice on their rights and responsibilities, including around cropped paths, vegetation, stiles, fences and obstructions. The survey highlighted the need for continued partnership working and clear communication with the Council's Public Rights of Way Service.

West Berkshire Council further supports landowners through supplying and advising on structures and signage, through providing waymarking or other help to solve problems.

The main area of concern for landowners was irresponsible use of the countryside. All of the landowners surveyed had experienced issues with dogs off leads bothering stock and 89% had experienced issues with trespassing, littering, disturbance or damage to the nature conservation interest of their land. The need for the public to exercise responsibility alongside access rights is an important area to address in this ROWIP.

Enforcement

It is illegal to obstruct a public right of way, for example through fencing or locking a gate across it, installing unauthorised structures, reducing its width, dumping rubbish or interfering with its surface. Crops can also obstruct a public right of way if the route is not reinstated or kept clear.

Although negotiation is the preferred way to resolve issues, sometimes enforcement is needed to protect the rights of the public. West Berkshire Council prioritises the resolution of issues requiring enforcement action.

Occasionally the police will be alerted to illegal activities. West Berkshire Council also works with the police and local stakeholders to tackle illegal vehicular activity at The Ridgeway and Bucklebury Common.

Our Environmental Responsibilities

West Berkshire Council is committed to protecting and enhancing the natural environment. The Council has declared Climate and Ecological Emergencies. The measures set out in this ROWIP are consistent with the objectives of the Council's Environment Strategy, which aims to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions for Council operations by 2030, and to integrate environmental considerations into all Council activities. In 2021 the 'Biodiversity Duty' for local authorities was strengthened. The environment and climate change are considered in public rights of way management in the following ways:

- The surfacing and drainage of paths within and close to wetland and riparian designated nature conservation sites, to account for potential runoff, especially close to the Special Areas of Conservation of the Kennet and Lambourn;
- The environmental impact of vegetation management, its extent and timing, especially in relation to designated nature conservation sites; sustainable drainage;

- Managing public rights of way as functioning links in West Berkshire's green and blue infrastructure network;
- Climate change and potential environmental impacts are considered during procurement. Sustainable materials with a longer lifespan will be sourced where possible;
- The climate change impact of operational activities, including travel, use of machinery and tools;
- The maintenance of paths within and around 'honeypot' sites which are designated for nature conservation, to minimise impact and help to disperse visitor pressure;
- The environmental impact of contractors working on the council's behalf, who will also be expected to minimise environmental impacts; and
- The risk to structures from climate change impacts, particularly damage to structures and surfaces from increased flooding.

Theme 1 Priorities and Actions: Looking after Public Rights of Way

All actions must be read in conjunction with the full text of the ROWIP.

Number	Action	Resource
Priority 1: To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.		
1	Engage with landowners to support them and provide advice on the good maintenance of public rights of way.	Core business
2	Survey the condition of all public rights of way every ten years, using volunteers in between.	££
3	Ensure priority PROWs are kept clear of vegetation and keep the priority maintenance list under regular review.	Core business
4	Resolve signage defects by April each year, alternating urban and rural locations. Add destinations at strategic locations.	Core business
5	Create 1 to 3 year specific targets for dealing with unsatisfactory structures on PROWs.	Core business
6	Annually review all seasonal Traffic Regulation Orders and create management plans for the PROWs involved.	Core business
7	Promote the use of best practice for the surfacing of multi-user paths.	Core business
8	Regular checks of signage and access points to statutory open access land (CROW Act land).	Core business
Priority 2: To improve environmental sustainability of public rights of way maintenance and contribute to environmental and climate stewardship.		
9	Include environmental sustainability in all public rights of way works and plans.	Core business
10	List public rights of way within ecologically sensitive or heritage sites and create appropriate management plans.	£
11	Identify popular 'honeypot' locations and work with partners to disperse recreational pressure.	££
12	Plan measures to reduce the impacts of climate change on PROW structures and surfaces, including management of drainage.	££



Theme 2: An Evolving Network

Introduction

Change is happening all the time. The climate emergency means that changes are needed in travel choices, with a shift to sustainable travel modes. There will be new housing in West Berkshire, moving the boundary of where the countryside meets the towns and resulting in more people wanting to access the countryside. There will be an ageing population, leading to more people with a range of disabilities.

Development in West Berkshire

Making sure public rights of way are protected and new routes created through development was one of highest priorities for both the public and local councils and was raised by several stakeholders. Priorities were around the need to protect public rights of way, to plan access strategically, create new access routes, improve routes for cyclists, horse riders and disabled people. Comments were made around disruption and closures during building and increased recreational use of public rights of way around new developments due to more people.

“Consideration needs to be given to planning new rights of way alongside and as an integral part of planned new housing developments. More people enjoying the existing paths and a growing population means that erosion and deterioration of paths is occurring faster than it was a just few years ago.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

West Berkshire’s adopted Local Plan is the strategic document which sets out the framework for future development. The Local Plan proposes larger housing allocations around Newbury and Thatcham, with smaller development throughout the district.

Public rights of way are included in the green infrastructure policies of the Local Plan. These set out the need to protect and enhance green infrastructure, address deficiencies and protect against loss.

Public rights of way are an important element of green infrastructure. As part of West Berkshire's Green and Blue Infrastructure approach, recreational access will be considered strategically, including the contribution of the public rights of way network to wider access provision.

Development affects public rights of way within the development site but can also have impacts beyond the site as more people use the network. It is important to ensure that existing public rights of way are protected and enhanced. A strategic assessment of access within and around the site should be made to take into account increase use and strategic linkages.

When development takes place, the following may be sought in relation to public rights of way:

- An assessment and access plan which details provision of access within and links beyond the development site;
- Provision for the long-term maintenance of access routes;
- New access connections where these enhance the access network;
- Provision of multi-user routes – accommodating as many users as possible. This could include equestrian access in areas where there is a deficiency of this type of public right of way. Upgrades in status to accommodate new users will be sought where possible. This may mean an increased path width is required;
- High levels of accessibility to accommodate disabled people; and
- Consideration of the impact of recreational use beyond the development 'red line' and the overall access in the area. Developer contributions may be sought to improve paths which will receive higher use, make paths more accessible and provide information for users.

Active Travel

The aim of active travel initiatives is to encourage people to make more of their everyday journeys by sustainable travel modes rather than in private motor vehicles.

Active travel is taken forward by the council's Highways Service through the Local Transport Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Although active travel focuses on utility journeys rather than leisure, there are overlaps between active travel and walking, cycling and horse riding for leisure. Often, in practice, active travel routes are used both for utility and recreation.

Public rights of way can form part of active travel networks as multi-user routes. They can also link into and provide circular routes from the active travel routes, providing added benefits to the investment. The Eling Way north of Newbury is an example of a successful strategic, multi-purpose route where active travel and public rights of way ambitions can align.



Eling Way

"The Eling Way is a great asset to the community."

Respondent to 2021 survey

The Kennet and Avon Canal towpath is another important route for both leisure and active travel.

“In order to reduce our carbon footprint we need to reduce car use. It is possible to commute from Thatcham and east / central Newbury to Aldermaston along the canal.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Multi-user routes need to be well-designed to avoid user conflicts. Equestrians need to be accommodated wherever possible, especially where there is a lower level of provision, disconnected routes for these users and busy roads.

Evolving the Network for Users

Equestrians and Cyclists

The public rights of way network for equestrians and cyclists is, in some parts of West Berkshire, disconnected with a limited length of number of routes. This means that equestrians and cyclists are forced to use roads; and both are vulnerable road users. Cycling has also grown in popularity and traffic-free routes are particularly important for inexperienced and family cyclists.

The area with the smallest and most disconnected network, the eastern Kennet Valley, is also the most populated area, with more people and more traffic. It is also in this area that new development will be taking place, increasing people, traffic and recreational demand on public rights of way.

It is the aspiration of the council to connect routes for these users through creating new, suitable, public rights of way. A priority for this will be in areas of high need and demand. However, it is acknowledged that creating new routes, for example through upgrading a public footpath or dedicating an entirely new public right of way, is difficult and time-consuming. The number of projects which can be delivered within the timeframe of this ROWIP will be small. Therefore every opportunity to increase the access network should be sought.

Each potential scheme should be fully assessed and start with the assumption that it will be multi-user. However, the range of users may be limited, for example, due to width restrictions. Consideration needs to be given in the design to the suitability of surfaces, structures, bollards, widths and exits onto the road, amongst other features, to ensure that the route is suitable for many user types. It should also be assumed that routes created for active travel will also be used for recreation and this should be taken into consideration.

Additional funding will be needed for new routes. The council will secure funding through partnership working and development. The evidence of this ROWIP and further research will be taken into account when determining priority projects and areas for improvements.

Some public rights of way are dead ends, and some bridleways, restricted byways and byways change into public footpaths along their length, meaning that users cannot follow the entire length of the path. Resolving these issues will help to increase the paths available. Other routes with public access and unmetalled, unclassified country roads could also help to connect public rights of way.

Some routes end at busy roads. Equestrian crossings may be beneficial in some cases.



Users of a downland bridleway

Road verges are often part of the highway and could be used, although these users are not permitted to use footways (pavements). Whilst this may increase the areas available there may be undergrowth and concealed holes which will make them unsuitable.

More research is needed to understand the location of equestrians, where they ride and the specific issues faced. This will help to prioritise projects and will inform active travel and access linked to housing development. Suggestions for new or upgraded routes were made by stakeholders for the previous ROWIP in 2010. This remains a useful resource. The suggestions will be reviewed in liaison with equestrians.

Further information on cyclists is also needed. Data such as Strava Metro, alongside consultation with user groups, will help to understand need and demand. Cycling, including the use of electric assisted cycles, is likely to increase which will bring changes in the levels of demand. Trends will need to be assessed during the course of this ROWIP.

Disabled People

The 2022 condition survey has helped to identify where there is less accessibility for those with reduced mobility and disabled people.

Public rights of way within one mile of the main towns and larger villages were evaluated.

The analysis provides detailed information on furniture or other issues which may reduce access for those with reduced mobility. This will enable targeted improvements to be made in areas of higher demand close to where people live. It will also help to identify accessible routes which can be promoted.

Mapping Public Rights of Way

The Definitive Map and Statement

Public rights of way are covered by many areas of law. This includes around keeping records, maps and descriptions of public rights of way up-to-date and making changes to public rights of way.

The definitive map and statement is the legal record of public rights of way. The map shows all recorded public rights of way and the statement provides further details, for example widths or limitations to the rights of the public. The map, statement and orders can be viewed at West Berkshire Council offices. There is an unofficial online version of the definitive map and statement on West Berkshire Council's website.

The map and statement must be continuously reviewed and kept up to date. Periodically they are 'consolidated' to incorporate all the changes that have been made. West Berkshire's map and statement were last consolidated and published on 1 March 2019.

Making Changes

Changes can be made to the map and statement but each case needs to be evaluated and the legal procedure followed.

A Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO) can be made to change the map and statement when there are anomalies. The evidence is evaluated and if this shows that a change is needed a DMMO can be made. This might add new rights of way; record additional rights (e.g. turning a footpath into a bridleway); remove rights; delete a right of way; or change some of the details of the route.

Public Path Orders (PPOs) are used to make changes to public rights of way. These can divert, extinguish or create public rights of way. Landowners or the public can ask for a change. The council assesses the application and if it decides it can go ahead, it carries out a consultation.

For the new route, as a principle, the council will seek the highest standard of accessibility and of infrastructure and, where possible, conformity to British Standard BS5709: 2018. The council will also expect new routes to have a sufficient width to ensure that paths are as convenient and accessible as possible for all users.

In August 2023 the Government published guidance on the diversion or extinguishment of public rights of way passing through dwellings or their land, farmyards or commercial and industrial premises. Landowners can also apply for a statement or declaration to prevent the creation of a public right of way.

The process of carrying out these changes can be lengthy and there is a charge for this service. A list of the current map modification orders can be viewed on West Berkshire Council's website.

The Deregulation Act 2015, once enacted in full, will affect the delivery of these services. Changes include more streamlined procedures for unrecorded rights and simplified order-making procedures. It may lead to more applications from landowners to change public rights of way, which may have resource implications as there will be legal timescales for response.

West Berkshire Council prefers that any new access is formally dedicated or created as part of the definitive public rights of way network or has another protected highway status. Paths permitted by landowners may however be considered where they form useful links.

Theme 2 Priorities and Actions: An Evolving Network

All actions must be read in conjunction with the full text of the ROWIP.

Number	Action	Resource
Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.		
13	Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.	Core business
14	Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.	Core business
15	Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.	£ - £££
Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.		
16	Ensure that high-quality, multi-user access improvements are included in and around new developments, addressing the needs of the area. Ensure that maintenance of new or improved routes is secured.	Core business
17	Seek new and improved traffic-free links for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists including road verges and permissive access. New links and improvements to be defined and listed with target completion date.	£ - £££
18	Continue to improve understanding of the need and demand of all users, exploring better use of data to identify access needs and trends.	Core business
19	Improve understanding of the needs of equestrians on the PROW network, including a review of desired improvements from the 2010 ROWIP.	Core business
20	Produce a report of all unsatisfactory equestrian gates and obstructions for equestrians. Engage with British Horse Society over priorities for resolution.	£
Priority 5: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement.		
21	Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030.	Core business
22	Incorporate Definitive Map anomalies into the annual work programmes.	Core business
23	Consider all applications for definitive map modification orders, including for the recording of unrecorded or under-recorded PROWs, and determine these in line with priority criteria.	Core business
24	Review regularly the path orders priority criteria and charging schedules.	Core business

Theme 3: Healthy and Prosperous Communities



Introduction

Public rights of way are the most extensive, free and available way that people can access the natural environment. Research for this ROWIP showed how highly people value public rights of way. It is important that everyone has the opportunity to use and benefit from public rights of way, irrespective of ability.

Supporting Health and Mental Wellbeing

Three quarters of people in the survey for this ROWIP said that health improvement was a reason they used public rights of way in West Berkshire. It was clear how valuable public rights of way are to people's wellbeing and mental health.

Whilst overall health in West Berkshire is good, there are small areas where health is poor, mainly in urban areas. There is also an ageing population which will increase levels of disability and poor health.

Making public rights of way more accessible and providing information will help more people to benefit from them. This could be for public rights of way close to where people live, in areas of poorer health or where people can use them for daily exercise.

There are Wellbeing Walks across West Berkshire for people of all abilities. There are opportunities to work with Wellbeing Walks to improve the routes used and document them so that people can use them at any time.

There are opportunities to work with partners in public health and other organisations to increase use of public rights of way to improve health, for example through green social prescribing.

“Without the use of these, many people, including myself, would never find a way out of depression. They are so important for keeping up mental wellbeing for myself and my daughter.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Access for Disabled People

There is great diversity amongst disabled people, taking different forms and having an impact on people's lives in many ways.

It is clearly not possible for all routes and paths, even at the most visited sites, to be accessible to all people. However, adopting the 'least restrictive access' principle is important. Working towards British Standard BS5709:2018 for gaps, gates and stiles will improve accessibility of the network over time.

Gates and gaps are more accessible than stiles. Since the first ROWIP, volunteers have replaced at least 200 stiles with gates.

"Now I'm older I find stiles difficult to climb over. Kissing gates are easier and more fun! ;)"
Respondent to 2021 survey



Volunteers complete the installation of a new gate

Condition surveys will help to prioritise where actions will potentially benefit the most people. Maintenance is also important, as damaged structures or overgrown paths present difficulties to users, especially less able people.

Although many public rights of way are accessible, there are currently no routes which are promoted as being accessible to disabled people, although there are high profile paths, such as the Kennet and Avon Canal towpath, and sites, including Snelsmore Country Park, where there are paths with higher levels of accessibility.

Through consulting with stakeholders there is clear demand for more accessible routes in West Berkshire. Routes which could be made more accessible through improvements will be investigated. When planning new accessible routes, provision in the wider access network will be taken into account.

As well as accessible routes, more information needs to be provided about levels of accessibility on public rights of way. Information on surfaces, infrastructure, gradients, parking, toilets and seating can help disabled people to make their own decisions on whether the route is suitable for them before they visit. Some of this information is recorded on the council's public online map and this could be improved.

"As a disabled powerchair user with a dog walks are a vital part of our life when I am well enough to get out."
Respondent to 2021 survey

There are many stakeholders, organisations, groups and individuals who can support this area of improvement and who have already brought valuable insight into the needs of these users. Continued working with these partners will improve understanding of needs, identify routes and help access projects to be delivered.

Information Provision

In the consultation and surveys, all types of users stated that they wanted more information on where to go and routes to follow.

The way that the public find routes for outdoor recreation is changing, with an increasing proportion using specialist websites or smartphone apps rather than paper maps and guidebooks.

West Berkshire Council has, in the past, produced information on recreational routes. Some of this information is now old and out of date. The public survey also showed very low awareness and use of this promotional material, with 75% not aware of it.

The resources to update or provide promotional material are severely limited. These resources must therefore be directed to where actions will make the greatest impact and which meet identified needs. The research for this ROWIP also showed that there are many other websites and sources of information. It is not a good use of resources for West Berkshire Council to duplicate this. The priorities for information provision by the council will therefore concentrate on the priority areas identified in this ROWIP. Additional benefits to rural businesses and tourism and to raise awareness of nature and heritage will be maximised where possible. The existing promoted routes will be reviewed in line with the priorities of the ROWIP.

Priorities for Information Provision

<p>Routes on your doorstep</p> <p>Linking where people live to the routes close to them, linking town with countryside and linking villages together.</p>
<p>Accessible routes</p> <p>Information for disabled people and those who are less mobile.</p>
<p>Equestrians</p> <p>West Berkshire Council will direct users to existing promotion material for equestrians. The council will make it easier for equestrians to find information on suitable public rights of way, investigating how to provide better information through the council’s online mapping function.</p>
<p>Motorised vehicle users and trail bikes</p> <p>West Berkshire Council will make it easier for these users to find information on suitable public rights of way, and show which routes are not permitted to be used. The council will investigate how to provide better information on the council’s online mapping function. There will also be further information on responsible use.</p>
<p>Pop-up Promotion</p> <p>Short-period promotion, highlighting particular routes, areas or public rights of way improvements, seasonal interest or other areas of interest.</p>

West Berkshire Council produces several residents’ newsletters. These will be used more effectively and regularly for ‘Pop-up Promotion’ and to provide information on public rights of way, improvements made and current projects. West Berkshire Council’s social media channels will be used to highlight projects, issues and places to visit.

“Perhaps offer some sort of email service which is a newsletter with monthly information on walking/ cycling routes. A bit like a ‘what’s on’ pamphlet. It could offer information on updates to public rights of way.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

There is an existing online mapping system which shows public rights of way and infrastructure. Over time, this online mapping will be improved to enable people to find routes, find where infrastructure is located and distinguish clearly between routes suitable for different users. It could also include information on public transport, seating or other information which will help people to decide on routes.

“Promote the map of the rights of way on the west Berkshire website, it’s all there on one page, much better than leaflets etc.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Other promotional material will be delivered when resources allow. Funding may be available through projects with partners, for example for health improvement, through the North Wessex Downs National Landscape or heritage projects.

The Ridgeway and Thames Path National Trails produce their own promotional materials and the council will continue to work with the National Trail Partnerships.

Rights and Responsibilities in Accessing the Countryside

Encouraging the responsible enjoyment of the countryside recurred throughout the survey responses. All the landowners wanted improved education of the public around the Countryside Code and their responsibilities while in the countryside, this being their highest priority. When asked about improvements to promotional material, providing information to encourage responsible use of the countryside was the second highest priority for both the public and parish and town councils.

Ways to promote responsible use of the countryside will be explored further. New promotional material will contain information on the Countryside Code and responsible countryside visiting and this will be included on West Berkshire Council's website. Social media and residents' newsletters will be used to remind users of responsibilities. This could be useful to highlight seasonal issues, such as lambing, or nesting birds.

“Promotional material should be clear about the allowed use of each type of right of way. Conflict comes from lack of understanding.”

Respondent to 2021 survey

The surveys revealed that there were some tensions between public rights of way users, for example between motorised vehicle and other public rights of way users. West Berkshire Council's Public Rights of Way Service policy paper on motorised vehicles prioritises actions around information provision, codes of conduct and liaison with user groups. User representative bodies have produced good practice guides for their members. The Ridgeway National Trail has also produced a leaflet and code of conduct for vehicles on The Ridgeway. There is scope for West Berkshire Council to promote responsible use and to highlight to other users where motorised vehicle users have the right to use public rights of way.

Climate and the Environment

Some of the most highly visited countryside sites are also protected for their nature conservation interest. Public rights of way have a role in spreading recreational activity and encouraging people to use other areas for some of their visits. The provision of information on routes close to home will support people in using local areas and will also benefit the environment through reducing the need to travel by private car.

“We live in a wonderful area with amazing countryside and wildlife.

These PROW allow access to people who can enjoy the natural environment and will pass on their love of nature to future generations. ”

Respondent to 2021 survey

Public transport options will be considered in any information provision. Over time, this information will be added to the online mapping system.

The Public Rights of Way Service will also continue to work with West Berkshire Council Highways to increase active travel.



Footbridge on a public footpath

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape covers 74% of West Berkshire. It is an ancient landscape of great beauty, of sweeps of chalk downland and dramatic scarp slopes, with more intimate river valleys, woodlands and commons.

All forms of outdoor recreation are popular in the National Landscape and as well as being accessed by residents, it attracts visitors from surrounding areas to enjoy the outstanding countryside.

Since December 2023 a new duty applies to public bodies, including West Berkshire Council, to 'seek to further the purposes' of the nationally designated landscapes. This purpose is conserving and enhancing natural beauty and furthering the aims of the Wessex Downs Management Plan.

Balancing access with the need for nature conservation, protecting heritage, supporting green tourism, encouraging courteous and responsible use of the countryside, improving connectivity of routes and improved signage and information are all priorities for the National Landscape

Priorities and issues include irresponsible use of the public rights of way, including by motorised vehicles which can cause damage to historic routes. The need for more information for disabled people and greater accessibility for all, alongside an untapped potential to better support health and wellbeing is recognised by the National Landscape. Encouraging non-motorised travel, connecting routes to enable users to avoid busy roads, protecting sensitive nature conservation sites and managing tensions between access and landowner commercial interests are also priorities.

The objectives and actions in this ROWIP deliver these priorities and address the issues of the Wessex Downs Management Plan. Therefore the ROWIP furthers the purposes of the National Landscape.

A meeting was held with the National Landscape during the development of the ROWIP and joint areas of working were discussed. Opportunities for partnership working will continue to be explored during the delivery of the ROWIP.

Theme 3 Priorities and Actions: Healthy and Prosperous Communities

All actions must be read in conjunction with the full text of the ROWIP.

Number	Action	Resource
Priority 6: Improve the accessibility of public rights of way so that more people can use them for enjoyment, health and mental wellbeing		
25	Use data on infrastructure to prioritise removal of unnecessary obstacles and make surface improvements around populous areas.	£ - £££
26	Replace stiles with new easy access gates or gaps at 10 locations per year. Involve volunteers where possible.	££
27	Use data on infrastructure to prioritise accessibility improvements. Upgrade 5 structures per year to improve accessibility, e.g. bridges, steps.	£ - £££
28	Record existing accessible routes and ensure they are maintained as accessible.	££
29	Gain a greater understanding of inclusive access, including for disabled people and under-represented groups. Design suitable access provision and promotion.	££
30	Create and publicise 5 new accessible routes per year, at least one of which should be of the scale of a capital project.	£ - £££
Priority 7: Improve information provision to enable more people to use public rights of way, support the economy and reduce conflicts		
31	Include accessibility information in all new promotion.	Core business
32	Improve public mapping to show levels of accessibility, public transport, and other information so people can make informed choices.	£
33	Review existing promotional material to be consistent with this ROWIP.	£
34	Produce at least 3 promotional items each year.	£
35	Support partners in developing new promoted routes, considering in particular those with health and wellbeing needs, those in deprived communities, and the rural economy.	£
36	Encourage responsible use of the countryside via publicity and use of the Countryside Code.	Core business

Theme 4: Effective Delivery



Introduction

This ROWIP cannot be fully delivered without additional funding. To maximise available resources, delivery will need to be effective, efficient and focus on priorities. Additional funding will need to be secured, with an emphasis on working with partners to achieve shared aspirations.

Working with Communities

Some support is already provided by volunteers, for example through the local Ramblers' Association. There is potential for volunteers and communities to be more involved in many aspects of public rights of way. This could include maintenance work, surveying, research or other roles.

Supporting volunteers and expanding their roles needs staff time and resources. Ways in which volunteer involvement can be increased will be explored.

Town and parish councils also have the potential to take an increased role in their public rights of way, including helping with communication. 30% of parish and town councils who replied to the survey had a 'footpath' representative. These can be an important point of contact for public rights of way matters. Local councils also have a range of powers to maintain public rights of way and take other actions. It is important that if the parish or town council exercises these powers or carries out maintenance that this is in liaison with West Berkshire Council. The Public Rights of Way Service aims to improve partnership working with town and parish councils to resolve public rights of way issues, seek improvements and develop new joint projects.

Customer Focus

From the engagement carried out for this ROWIP, there is generally good public awareness that West Berkshire Council is responsible for public rights of way, but less clarity around how problems should be reported. Most people used 'Report a Problem' online or direct to the Public Rights of Way Service.

There were high levels of satisfaction with how West Berkshire Council Public Rights of Way Service responded to problems. All aspects of service provision were rated as ‘good’, with the highest scoring aspect the council officer’s manner.

There was lower satisfaction around information given on the progress of the problem. Ways this aspect can be improved will be investigated.

Partnerships

Building Partnerships

Through developing this ROWIP awareness of the Rights of Way Service has increased amongst existing and new stakeholders. This needs to continue as there are significant mutual benefits to increased partnership working. Several stakeholders expressed interest in developing collaborative projects. There are opportunities to explore particularly, but not exclusively, in the following areas.

Green and Blue Infrastructure – Public rights of way are a crucial component of green and blue infrastructure. They should feature strongly in green infrastructure plans and policies, including in development planning, as well as projects taken forward by partners.

Health and Wellbeing – A better understanding of the needs of disabled people and projects to improve access provision. Work is needed with new and existing health partners to understand further how public rights of way can contribute to health and wellbeing targets, for example through Wellbeing Walks and social prescribing.

Active Travel – The council will increase its role in delivering both strategic routes and routes for short utility journeys and link these with leisure provision. New multi-user routes in new developments will be pursued.

Economy and Visitor Economy – Public rights of way are part of what supports West Berkshire’s high quality of life, making it a desirable place to work and live. There is potential to raise awareness of this amongst the business community, including the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. There are also opportunities to enhance the visitor offer in West Berkshire through working with tourism and heritage partners.

Local Access Forum

The Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum (LAF) is a statutory independent group which provides advice to the council with the aim of improving public access in West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham. Its duties are set out in law. Members are volunteers and represent user groups, land managers, councillors and other relevant interests. This wide membership helps to improve public access while making sure the interests of land managers and nature conservation are met. They provide advice, and both challenge and support the council’s Public Rights of Way Service.

The LAF has been involved in developing this ROWIP and will be involved with its delivery. The council will provide regular progress reports to the LAF throughout the lifetime of this ROWIP. It will also continue to seek the advice of the LAF on strategy, policy and targets.

Income and Resources

Whilst some aspects of this ROWIP may be delivered through existing resources and workstreams, additional funding will be needed to deliver many of the actions.

Some of this may be secured from the council, for example through working collaboratively on active travel projects or through developer contributions. Grant sources and additional internal funding may be available, and this will usually require working with partners.

Some services are chargeable. The council will periodically review these to ensure the costs of delivering chargeable services are recovered.

Theme 4 Priorities and Actions: Effective Delivery

All actions must be read in conjunction with the full text of the ROWIP.

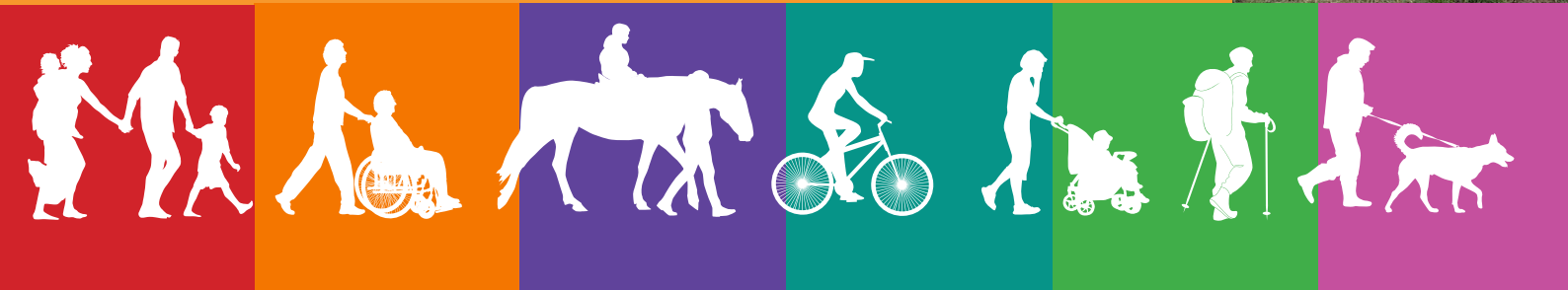
Number	Action	Resource
Priority 8: Ensure that this ROWIP is resourced and delivered, and that progress is monitored and the plan reviewed.		
37	Seek additional resources to deliver this ROWIP as necessary.	Core business
38	Work with partners to ensure the priorities of this ROWIP are included in strategies, policies and funding bids.	Core business
39	Produce annual targets against the Actions in this Delivery Plan, to be approved by the Portfolio.	Core business
40	Assess this ROWIP after 5 years to ensure it continues to align with West Berkshire's priorities and new information.	Core business
41	Review this ROWIP after 10 years.	Core business
Priority 9: Increase involvement and working with partners, communities and volunteers.		
42	Develop working partnerships both within the council and with external partners to develop and deliver projects.	Core business
43	Explore and expand volunteering opportunities. Seek a Volunteer Support Officer (voluntary) to expand volunteering and community action.	££
44	Develop partnerships with Parish and Town Councils to deliver improvements to the PROW network and priorities of this ROWIP.	£
Priority 10: To continue to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and seek ways to improve.		
45	Continually improve visibility of reporting mechanisms for the public, and achieve timely provision of feedback.	Core business
46	Periodically seek customer feedback on provision of services.	Core business

Call to Action

West Berkshire is proud of its PROW network. However, there are some gaps in provision and areas for further improvement, as explained in this document. It is anticipated that delivery of the priorities and actions set out in this Plan will help consolidate existing strengths and help to build a network that will continue to serve future generations of residents, visitors and other stakeholders.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025 – 2035

Executive Summary



WestBerkshire
COUNCIL

About West Berkshire's Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Every council which is responsible for public rights of way must produce a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It sets out the council's goals and priorities for public rights of way.

A ROWIP has to assess how well public rights of way meet the needs of the public. This includes those who already use public rights of way and those who would like to. It must assess how public rights of way can encourage exercise and recreation and support use by those who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility problems.

The public, stakeholders and partners were consulted on their views before the ROWIP was produced. This revealed how much people value public rights of way. It showed how important they are for health, mental wellbeing and for enjoying nature. Many people use them regularly, often using them every day.



Volunteers celebrating installation of 300th gate

This, along with an extensive review of evidence, has resulted in the priorities and actions in this ROWIP.

The main ROWIP document is set out in four themes:

- **Theme 1: Looking after Public Rights of Way**
- **Theme 2: An Evolving Network**
- **Theme 3: Healthy and Prosperous Communities**
- **Theme 4: Effective Delivery**



Couple walking

Main Findings and Priorities

The public said that the maintenance of public rights of way is their highest priority.

Residents of West Berkshire highly value their public rights of way. They are one of the most used public assets with 91% of people using them once a week or more often. Maintaining public rights of way so that they are easy to use was the public’s highest priority. They wanted paths to be clear of vegetation, structures to be in good condition and paths well signed. Landowners are key partners in this, and the council will provide support and advice to them.

The priority which delivers this is:

Theme 1 Priority 1: To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible.

- Action 1** Engage with landowners to support them and provide advice on the good maintenance of public rights of way.
- Action 2** Survey the condition of all public rights of way every ten years, using volunteers in between.
- Action 3** Ensure priority PROWs are kept clear of vegetation and keep the priority maintenance list under regular review.
- Action 4** Resolve signage defects by April each year, alternating urban and rural locations. Add destinations at strategic locations.

- Action 5** Create 1-to-3-year specific targets for dealing with unsatisfactory structures on PROWs.
- Action 6** Annually review all seasonal Traffic Regulation Orders and create management plans for the PROWs involved.
- Action 7** Promote the use of best practice for the surfacing of multi-user paths.
- Action 8** Regular checks of signage and access points to statutory open access land (CROW Act land).

The second highest priority for the public was protecting existing public rights of way.

Of particular concern were negative impacts associated with development. The public wanted good outcomes from development and improvements to be secured, with new and improved routes created for a wide range of users.

The council also carries out important legal work which protects public rights of way.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

- Action 16** Ensure that high-quality, multi-user access improvements are included in and around new developments, addressing the needs of the area. Ensure that maintenance of new or improved routes is secured.
- Action 17** Seek new and improved traffic free links for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists including road verges and permissive access. New links and improvements to be defined and listed with target completion date.

- Action 19** Improve understanding of the needs of equestrians on the PROW network, including a review of desired improvements from the 2010 ROWIP.
- Action 20** Produce a report of all unsatisfactory equestrian gates and obstructions for equestrians. Engage with British Horse Society over priorities for resolution.

Theme 2 Priority 5: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement.

- Action 21** Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030.
- Action 22** Incorporate Definitive Map anomalies into the annual work programmes.
- Action 23** Consider all applications for definitive map modification orders, including for the recording of unrecorded or under-recorded PROWs, and determine these in line with priority criteria.
- Action 24** Review regularly the path orders priority criteria and charging schedules.

Public rights of way are important for health and wellbeing. People value them highly and say they improve their quality of life. However, not everyone has the same opportunity to use and benefit from them.

Three quarters of the public said they use public rights of way to improve their health. However, disabled people, those in poorer health, younger people and those of 'non-White' ethnicity use public rights of way less. Improving the condition and accessibility of public rights of way will help more people to access them, including disabled people. More and good quality information is also important.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

- Action 13** Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.
- Action 14** Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.
- Action 15** Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.

Theme 3 Priority 6: Improve the accessibility of public rights of way so that more people can use them for enjoyment, health and mental wellbeing.

- Action 25** Use data on infrastructure to prioritise removal of unnecessary obstacles and make surface improvements around populous areas.
- Action 26** Replace stiles with new easy access gates or gaps at 10 locations per year. Involve volunteers where possible.
- Action 27** Use data on infrastructure to prioritise accessibility improvements. Upgrade 5 structures per year to improve accessibility, e.g. bridges, steps.
- Action 28** Record existing accessible routes and ensure they are maintained as accessible.

Action 29 Gain a greater understanding of inclusive access, including for disabled people and under represented groups. Design suitable access provision and promotion.

Action 30 Create and publicise 5 new accessible routes per year, at least one of which should be of the scale of a capital project.

Theme 3 Priority 7: Improve information provision to enable more people to use public rights of way, support the economy and reduce conflicts.

Action 31 Include accessibility information in all new promotion.

Action 32 Improve public mapping to show levels of accessibility, public transport, and other information so people can make informed choices.

Action 33 Review existing promotional material to be consistent with this ROWIP.

Action 34 Produce at least 3 promotional items each year.

Action 35 Support partners in developing new promoted routes, considering in particular those with health and wellbeing needs, those in deprived communities, and the rural economy.

Action 36 Encourage responsible use of the countryside via publicity and use of the Countryside Code.

There is wide variation in the provision of public rights of way in different parts of the district. Some of the most populated areas have fewer and disconnected routes.

There is wide variation in the provision of public rights of way in different parts of the district. Some of the most populated areas have fewer and disconnected routes.

The difference of provision means that not everyone has the same opportunities. There are more people, fewer and more disconnected public rights of way, more traffic and poorer health outcomes in the eastern Kennet Valley and south of the district compared to the north. This has an impact on public rights of way users. Going forward, the council will need to consider how to address these inequalities.

Equestrians and cyclists in particular have to use roads to connect their journeys, especially in the parts of the district where there is more traffic.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents.

Action 13 Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.

Action 14 Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.

Action 15 Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Actions listed on page 3/4 .

Environmental sustainability, protecting the natural world and adapting to climate change are important in a changing world.

Sustainability and protecting the outstanding natural assets of the district are important priorities. Also important is responding to climate change and the effects it will have on public rights of way. Public rights of way also have a role to play in supporting people to make sustainable travel choices.

The priorities and actions which deliver this are:

Theme 1 Priority 2: To improve environmental sustainability of public rights of way maintenance and contribute to environmental and climate stewardship.

- Action 9** Include environmental sustainability in all public rights of way works and plans.
- Action 10** List public rights of way within ecologically sensitive or heritage sites and create appropriate management plans.
- Action 11** Identify popular ‘honeypot’ locations and work with partners to disperse recreational pressure.
- Action 12** Plan measures to reduce the impacts of climate change on PROW structures and surfaces, including management of drainage.

Theme 2 Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire’s residents.

Actions listed on page 5 .

Theme 2 Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.

Actions listed on page 3/4.

The ROWIP is ambitious. To deliver it fully will need allocation of resources, new ways of working and linking with partners with common goals.

The consultation process engaged with many organisations. Some of these were existing partners, but many were new. There was interest in working together to maximise opportunities. The existing volunteer group already delivers valuable work but there is more that can be achieved. There are also opportunities to work in partnership with parish and town councils.

The priorities which deliver this are:

Theme 4 Priority 8: Ensure that this ROWIP is resourced and delivered, and that progress is monitored and the plan reviewed.

- Action 37** Seek additional resources to deliver this ROWIP as necessary.
- Action 38** Work with partners to ensure the priorities of this ROWIP are included in strategies, policies and funding bids.
- Action 39** Produce annual targets against the Actions in this Delivery Plan, to be approved by the Portfolio.
- Action 40** Assess this ROWIP after 5 years to ensure it continues to align with West Berkshire’s priorities and new information.
- Action 41** Review this ROWIP after 10 years.

Theme 4 Priority 9: Increase involvement and working with partners, communities and volunteers.

Action 42 Develop working partnerships both within the council and with external partners to develop and deliver projects.

Action 43 Explore and expand volunteering opportunities. Seek a Volunteer Support Officer (voluntary) to expand volunteering and community action.

Action 44 Develop partnerships with Parish and Town Councils to deliver improvements to the PROW network and priorities of this ROWIP.

Theme 4 Priority 10: To continue to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and seek ways to improve

Action 45 Continually improve visibility of reporting mechanisms for the public, and achieve timely provision of feedback.

Action 46 Periodically seek customer feedback on provision of services.



Keeping paths clear



Users of a downland bridleway



Hedge laying in Beedon

Delivery, Monitoring and Review

The actions in this ROWIP go beyond what is required by law for maintaining public rights of way. Some aspects of the ROWIP may be delivered using existing resources and workstreams, but additional funding will be needed to deliver many of the actions.

More detailed targets, based on the high-level actions in this plan, will be put forward in a Delivery Plan. These targets will be formed by reviewing the current delivery of actions, available resources and priorities.

Call to Action

West Berkshire is proud of its PROW network. However, there are some gaps in provision and areas for further improvement. It is anticipated that delivery of the priorities and actions set out in this Plan will help consolidate existing strengths and help to build a network that will continue to serve future generations of residents, visitors and other stakeholders.



Trail Riders on a downland byway



New retaining wall in Beenham

West Berkshire District Council - Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2025-2035 - Delivery Plan					
Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
THEME 1: LOOKING AFTER THE NETWORK					
Priority 1: To protect the network and maintain it in the best condition possible, prioritising safety and areas of greatest need and seeking improvements where possible					
Engage with landowners to support them and provide advice on the good maintenance of public rights of way.	1	CB	1. Liaise with National Landscapes regarding their engagement with landowners. 2. Speak to the National Farmers' Union about the best approach. 3. Increase team knowledge of farm payment schemes. 4. Investigate IT methods of communicating easily with landowners.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Survey the condition of all public rights of way every ten years, using volunteers in between.	2	££	1. Keep an ongoing record of lessons learnt for the next survey. 2. Ensure that volunteer surveying groups use best practice to keep records up-to-date.		Services we are proud of.
Ensure priority PROWs are kept clear of vegetation and keep the priority maintenance list under regular review.	3	CB	1. Explore and plan measures to reduce vegetation growth e.g. removal of arisings from path surface/hedge laying. 2. Remind landowners to cut their hedges.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Resolve signage defects by April each year, alternating urban and rural locations. Add destinations at strategic locations.	4	CB	1. Resolve all defects in urban locations in 2025/26 and rural locations in 2026/27. 2. Begin to explore best locations for destination signage e.g. to canal, and inter-village.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Create 1 to 3 year specific targets for dealing with unsatisfactory structures on PROWs.	5	CB	1. Create a realistic target document to include measures to deal with rotting wood.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.

Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
Annually review all seasonal Traffic Regulation Orders and create management plans for the PROWs involved.	6	CB	1. Review all Bucklebury temporary traffic regulation orders with Bucklebury Parish Council in January 2026, and form a revised plan for future repairs and closures in liaison with the Bucklebury Common Interest Group.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Promote the use of best practice for the surfacing of multi-user paths.	7	CB	1. Ongoing upkeep of knowledge e.g. via IPROW. 2. Liaise with WBC highway engineering colleagues.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Regular checks of signage and access points to statutory open access land (CROW Act land).	8	CB	1. Clarify the legal record of Open Access Land. 2. Audit each area for existing access and signage standards.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Priority 2: To improve environmental sustainability of public rights of way maintenance and contribute to environmental and climate stewardship.					
Include environmental sustainability in all public rights of way works and plans.	9	CB	1. Identify suitable training for the PROW team.		Services we are proud of. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency.
List public rights of way within ecologically sensitive or heritage sites and create appropriate management plans.	10	£	1. Review and update the team checklist of key items to consider when carrying out works.		Services we are proud of. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency.
Identify popular 'honeypot' locations and work with partners to disperse recreational pressure.	11	££	1. Use at least one promotional item to encourage people to explore other areas. Mention local facilities e.g. pub, shop.		Services we are proud of. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Plan measures to reduce the impacts of climate change on PROW structures and surfaces, including management of drainage.	12	££	1. Continue work to identify climate-resilient structures e.g. aluminium posts. 2. Refer to existing work done to identify high-risk areas. 3. Continue work to improve drainage from PROW surfaces.		Services we are proud of. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency.
THEME 2: AN EVOLVING NETWORK					
Priority 3: Ensure that access is strategically planned and delivered to meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents					

Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
Plan public rights of way work strategically alongside other council teams, e.g. Highways, Leisure, Health, Planning and Environment. Develop working partnerships to deliver projects.	13	CB	1. Create dialogue with all teams, starting with an introductory email or meeting on the adoption of the ROWIP.		Services we are proud of.
Ensure that priorities in this ROWIP are included in relevant external plans and strategies and in Neighbourhood Development Plans.	14	CB	1. Send the adopted ROWIP to all Parish Councils, draw attention to policies which can be used for local projects.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Support projects to increase walking and cycling for short journeys.	15	£ - £££	1. Identify useful links which could be improved (e.g. routes to school already identified).		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Priority 4: Ensure that the network evolves to meet current and future needs of users and that connectivity is improved.					
Ensure that high-quality, multi-user access improvements are included in and around new developments, addressing the needs of the area. Ensure that maintenance of new or improved routes is secured.	16	CB	1. Increase knowledge of planning policy to use requests for S.106 and CIL funding more vigorously.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Seek new and improved traffic-free links for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists including road verges and permissive access. New links and improvements to be defined and listed with target completion date.	17	£ - £££	1. Seek internal advice on how best to identify user demand. 2. Refer to the 2010 ROWIP 'desired improvements' mapping layer. 3. Liase with Local Access Forum.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Continue to improve understanding of the need and demand of all users, exploring better use of data to identify access needs and trends.	18	CB	1. Refer back to user responses to ROWIP and follow up for more information if required.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Improve understanding of the needs of equestrians on the PROW network, including a review of desired improvements from the 2010 ROWIP.	19	CB	1. Refer back to user responses to ROWIP and follow up for more information if required.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.

Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
Produce a report of all unsatisfactory equestrian gates and obstructions for equestrians. Engage with British Horse Society over priorities for resolution.	20	£	1. Complaints about equestrian gates are not being received - speak to equestrians about what are their true priorities.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Priority 5: To uphold the council's legal duties to provide an up-to-date definitive map and statement					
Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030.	21	CB			Services we are proud of.
Incorporate Definitive Map anomalies into the annual work programmes.	22	CB	1. Covered by the annual Path Order Case Programme produced by the Definitive Map Officer.		Services we are proud of.
Consider all applications for definitive map modification orders, including for the recording of unrecorded or under-recorded PROWs, and determine these in line with priority criteria.	23	CB	1. Covered by the annual Path Order Case Programme produced by the Definitive Map Officer.		Services we are proud of.
Review regularly the path orders priority criteria and charging schedules.	24	CB	1. Covered by the annual Path Order Case Programme produced by the Definitive Map Officer.		Services we are proud of.
THEME 3: HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES					
Priority 6: Improve the accessibility of public rights of way so that more people can use them for enjoyment, health and mental wellbeing					
Use data on infrastructure to prioritise removal of unnecessary obstacles and make surface improvements around populous areas.	25	£ - £££	1. Use existing data to identify quick wins via easy improvements in these areas. 2. Liaise with Wellbeing Walks colleagues.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Replace stiles with new easy access gates or gaps at 10 locations per year.	26	££	1. Replace stiles with new easy access gates or gaps at 10 locations, prioritising populous areas and obvious areas of need.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Use data on infrastructure to prioritise accessibility improvements.	27	£ - £££	An underlying principle to actions 25, 26, 29 and 30.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Record existing accessible routes and ensure they are maintained as accessible.	28	££	1. Use existing data on 'surface type' and internal PROW knowledge to begin to map these routes. 2. Ask volunteer surveyors to report on accessibility detail.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.

Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
Gain a greater understanding of inclusive access, including for disabled people and under-represented groups. Design suitable access provision and promotion.	29	££	1. Refer back to user responses to ROWIP and follow up for more information if required. 2. Explore the use of term contractor WSP.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Create and publicise 5 new accessible routes per year, at least one of which should be of the scale of a capital project.	30	£ - £££	Create and publicise 5 new accessible routes, at least one of which should be of the scale of a capital project. Prioritise populous areas and obvious areas of need.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Priority 7: Improve information provision to enable more people to use public rights of way, support the economy and reduce conflicts					
Include accessibility information in all new promotion.	31	CB	1. Include accessibility information in all new promotion.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Improve public mapping to show levels of accessibility, public transport, and other information so people can make informed choices.	32	£	1. Speak to WBC internal GIS colleagues. 2. Explore the use of term contractor WSP. 3. Ask volunteer surveyors to report on accessibility detail.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all.
Review existing promotional material to be consistent with this ROWIP.	33	£	For a future year - the material is available on-line so is of use already.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Produce at least 3 promotional items each year.	34	£	Produce at least 3 promotional items. Note target in Actions 11 and 36.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Support partners in developing new promoted routes, considering in particular those with health and wellbeing needs, those in deprived communities, and the rural economy.	35	£	This is largely reactive, but sending the ROWIP to Parish Councils could act as a catalyst for requests for support.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Encourage responsible use of the countryside via publicity and use of the Countryside Code.	36	CB	1. At least one promotional item to cover this aspect.		Services we are proud of. A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
THEME 4: EFFECTIVE DELIVERY					
Priority 8: Ensure that this ROWIP is resourced and delivered, and that progress is monitored and the plan reviewed.					

Action Title	Action Number	Resourcing / Core Business (CB)	Proposed Year 1(2026-27) target to be agreed with Portfolio Holder and in consultation with the Local Access Forum	Red/Yellow/Amber progress	Links to Council Strategy 2023-27
Seek additional resources to deliver this ROWIP as necessary.	37	CB	1. Seek necessary funding for elements in Year 1.		Services we are proud of.
Work with partners to ensure the priorities of this ROWIP are included in strategies, policies and funding bids.	38	CB	Related to Action 13.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Produce annual targets against the Actions in this Delivery Plan, to be approved by the Portfolio.	39	CB	See this column.		Services we are proud of.
Assess this ROWIP after 5 years to ensure it continues to align with West Berkshire's priorities and new information.	40	CB			Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Review this ROWIP after 10 years.	41	CB			Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Priority 9: Increase involvement and working with partners, communities and volunteers					
Develop working partnerships both within the council and with external partners to develop and deliver projects.	42	CB	Related to Actions 13 and 38.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Explore and expand volunteering opportunities. Seek a Volunteer Support Officer (voluntary) to expand volunteering and community action.	43	££	1. Work with the Newbury Volunteer Bureau to recruit a Volunteer Support Officer during 2026.		Services we are proud of. A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Develop partnerships with Parish and Town Councils to deliver improvements to the PROW network and priorities of this ROWIP.	44	£	1. Continue and expand the existing fruitful relationships with some Parish Councils. 2. Sending of the ROWIP to all Parish Councils may be a catalyst for wider discussions.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Priority 10: To continue to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction and seek ways to improve.					
Continually improve visibility of reporting mechanisms for the public, and achieve timely provision of feedback.	45	CB	1. Improve ongoing updates on projects to customers, via IT means if possible.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.
Periodically seek customer feedback on provision of services.	46	CB	1. A feedback option is available to the public in the WDM customer reporting mechanism. Continue to act on all feedback.		Services we are proud of. Thriving communities with a strong local voice.

Local Planning Enforcement Plan 2025

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	6 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Denise Gaines
Report Author:	Laura Callan
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4735

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Executive to carry out public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan. The Local Enforcement Plan is not a statutory requirement, but it is an important document which sets out the objectives and priorities of the planning enforcement service and provides information and guidance for residents, developers and other interested parties, on how complaints about unauthorised development are handled. It identifies priorities for enforcement action which will inform decisions about the investigation process and when enforcement action will be taken.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To approve public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan 2025.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	No financial implications. The plan is designed to be implemented using existing resources.
Human Resource:	No human resource implications. The plan is designed to be implemented using existing resources.
Legal:	None.
Risk Management:	The updated Enforcement Plan alters the priority for investigations and is designed to ensure breaches that have the potential for most impact are prioritised for investigations

	which reduces the risk of harmful and irreversible development occurring.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	The Enforcement Plan is not a statutory requirement but national planning practice guidance supports the use of such plans.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		The update to the Enforcement plan sets out the Councils approach to planning enforcement investigations and would not significantly alter service provision. As such it would have a neutral impact upon inequality.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The updated enforcement plan would not have disproportionate impacts upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.
Environmental Impact:	X			Implementation of the enforcement plan has the potential for positive impacts upon environmental outcomes where it secures high quality development and compliance with policy requirements.

Health Impact:	X			Implementation of the enforcement plan has the potential for positive impacts upon health outcomes where it secures high quality development and compliance with policy requirements.
ICT Impact:		X		Implementation of the enforcement plan will utilise existing digital processes.
Digital Services Impact:		X		Implementation of the enforcement plan will utilise existing digital processes.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			The updated enforcement plan aligns with the Council's Priority 1. Services we are proud of. It sets out how decisions will be made and therefore provides transparency of decision making and accountability. The changes ensure operational effectiveness within the parameters of available resources.
Core Business:		X		The Enforcement Plan update is considered business as usual.
Data Impact:		x		The updated plan will not result in different or additional data impacts.
Consultation and Engagement:	There is no statutory requirement to carry out public consultation on the Local Enforcement Plan and no public consultation has been carried out.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report seeks approval to carry out public consultation on the updated West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan 2025.
- 4.2 The Council's current plan was approved in 2022. The plan has been refreshed and modified to update the priority classification to ensure that efforts are focussed on the most significant breaches and to carry out initial assessment in a more timely way.
- 4.3 The main changes to the plan comprise the re-prioritisation of investigation types to include an urgent category 1, with investigation undertaken within 2 working days and an additional category 4 introduced for low priority investigations unlikely to result in harm.

- 4.4 A local enforcement plan is not a statutory requirement but is considered a useful tool to guide enforcement investigations to provide consistency and transparency in decision making.
- 4.5 It is therefore recommended that the Executive approve the consultation on the Draft Local Enforcement Plan 2025.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report seeks approval from the Executive of the updated West Berkshire Enforcement Plan 2025. The current enforcement plan was last updated in 2022. An enforcement plan is not a statutory requirement but it is a useful tool to set out how the Council will address breaches of planning control.
- 5.2 Whilst planning enforcement action is discretionary, the duty to investigate an alleged breach is not. The national planning policy framework and national planning guidance provides that enforcement activity should be 'proportionate' and suggests publishing a local enforcement plan.
- 5.3 It is therefore considered an appropriate and useful tool to set out the Council's approach to planning enforcement investigations and provides a framework to guide such investigations and action.

Background

- 5.4 The Council's planning enforcement service comprises two Enforcement Officers and on average 60 enforcement complaints are received per month. This results in a significant workload and the need for a clear framework of prioritisation to ensure that Officer time can be focussed on those breaches which have the potential to result in most serious impacts.
- 5.5 Many alleged breaches of planning control result in the submission of a planning application to regularise the breach. An average of 50% of enforcement complaints received are found not to be a breach of planning control or not expedient to take enforcement action because there is no unacceptable harm to amenity arising or it is policy compliant development. The minority of investigations result in the service of enforcement notices because in most cases, the Council will encourage the submission of a planning application and/or a negotiated compliance which is the most effective way to remedy breaches of planning control. This is also in accordance with national guidance and best practice.
- 5.6 A breach of planning control is not a criminal offence and there are no immediate fines or penalties that can be imposed when a breach is established. It is only when a notice is served, and the compliance period or requirements are not adhered to that the Council can consider the expediency of prosecution through the courts. Planning enforcement processes are lengthy, with a right of appeal to the Planning Inspectorate against enforcement notices which can take a considerable amount of time to reach a

decision, or through the courts in some circumstances. Enforcement appeals generally take much longer to reach decision than planning application appeals. In June 2025 written representation enforcement appeals took on average 71 weeks to reach decision. As such, a negotiated compliance through remedying the breach, or through consideration of a planning application allowing the full impacts to be assessed and conditions and mitigation secured, can be a more efficient way of dealing with breaches and have better outcomes.

- 5.7 In circumstances where there is a significant level of planning harm, stop notices or injunctions can be issued but there is a high bar to reach to justify this action and as such, these are used only in the most significant circumstances. Stop notices can have immediate and significant consequences to individuals or businesses and the Council must ensure that there is a justifiable benefit arising in terms of safeguarding amenity or public safety. Both injunctions and stop notices can be challenged by way of application to the High Court for judicial review which is a lengthy and costly process for all parties. There are financial implications for the Council should a stop notice be quashed, varied or withdrawn as compensation may be payable. As such there must be a proportionate and considered approach to this type of action.
- 5.8 Notwithstanding the discretionary nature of the planning enforcement service, expectations are high among elected members, residents and stakeholders and there is significant pressure to serve an enforcement notice in the event of unauthorised development. It is acknowledged that resolving breaches through negotiation causes frustration as residents feel that the Council is not acting robustly, but this is usually the fastest way to resolve the breach. The fact that a breach has been undertaken without planning permission is not a material consideration that can be taken into account through the planning application process.
- 5.9 Despite the constraints of the planning enforcement system, willful breaches of planning control are not condoned by the Council and it is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. However enforcement action can place significant financial pressures on both the Council and landowners particularly in cases that are progressed through the court system which can take many months, if not years to resolve and which require legal representation. There are existing pressures on the Council's revenue budget arising from recent complex appeals, challenges to the adopted Local Plan, further policy requirements and implementation of planning reforms. Enforcement action must be balanced with what is reasonable, proportionate and achievable within available resources, ensuring undue financial pressure is not placed upon the Council and public funds are used appropriately to secure the best outcomes for the district.
- 5.10 The Enforcement Plan 2025 is therefore drafted with this in mind, to prioritise investigations which have the potential for significant impacts. Those breaches which are likely to comply with the development plan or that result in limited or no harm, to be given a lower priority. It will also demonstrate transparency in decision making, showing a clear rationale as to why some issues raised are not planning breaches and so cannot appropriately be treated as such through our process.

Proposals

- 5.11 The plan has been modified to update the priority classification to ensure that efforts are focussed on the most significant breaches and to carry out initial assessment of those breaches in a more timely way. Updates and modifications to the current plan (2022) include the following.
- 5.12 The prioritisation of cases has changed from 3 categories to 4. This is due to a high number of cases falling within category 2 which meant that the prioritisation system did not work effectively. Category 1 is now identified as urgent where investigation is undertaken within 2 working days. Category 4 has been introduced for low priority cases which are unlikely to result in unacceptable harm and therefore will only be investigated when resources allow.
- 5.13 Initial assessment timescales have changed from 5-20 working days in the previous plan to 2-15 working days in the updated plan. This means that more significant breaches will be initially assessed more quickly however less serious breaches may now have a lower priority and take longer to be assessed.
- 5.14 Untidy land and potential S215 notices will now be category 4 and service of any S215 notice will be subject to availability of resources.
- 5.15 Breach of construction phase emergency plans or breach of conditions relating to these emergency plans will be a category 1 priority as ongoing works can present an immediate threat to public safety and the opportunity to enforce or ensure works cease will pass quickly.
- 5.16 Breach of operational phase emergency plans or related conditions will be category 2 as although a public safety concern, they are not as time critical as construction phase plans.
- 5.17 The plan identifies that all investigations will be carried out thoroughly and accurately in accordance with the following priorities:

Level 1 - Urgent Action (Initial Assessment within 2 working days)

Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of substantial and irreversible impacts on the environment or local community. This may include, for example:

- Damage or felling of TPO trees;
- Ongoing unauthorised works to a listed building or demolition in a conservation area;
- Setting up of an unauthorised caravan site where there is an imminent risk of residential occupation;
- Developments which result in significant danger to the public;
- Failure to produce, agree and comply with a construction phase emergency plan and construction work is continuing.

Level 2 – High Priority (Initial Assessment within 15 working days)

Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of significant impacts on the environment, and/or significant public interest. These will be cases which are less immediate than Level 1, but where a prompt response is required. This may include, for example:

- Breaches causing significant pollution or traffic hazards;
- Potential harm to listed buildings;
- Breaches causing significant ongoing local disturbances;
- Breaches of condition on major development sites (10 or more dwellings, 1,000sqm or more of floorspace or a site area of 1ha or more)
- Significant breaches where there is a risk of imminent immunity from enforcement action;
- Failure to produce, agree and comply with an operational phase emergency plan.

Level 3 – Standard Priority (Initial Assessment within 40 working days)

Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of planning harm. This will be the priority level for the majority of enforcement cases, and will normally include the following:

- Breaches that are likely to remain stable and that are unlikely to give rise to any severe or lasting harm to amenities;
- Householder developments;
- Fences, walls, gates and other means of enclosure;
- Breaches of condition on non-major developments;
- Unauthorised material changes of use.

Level 4 - Low Priority (Over 40 working days or not expedient to investigate)

Alleged/potential breaches of planning control which are unlikely to result in harm and/or are trivial in nature. For example:

- Satellite dishes and flues;
- Building-mounted solar panels;
- Commercial adverts (not harming public safety);
- Temporary breaches;
- Untidy sites;
- Proactive internal referrals from other services within the Council.

Initial desktop study to include previous planning application(s) and/or enforcement investigation(s), establish if Permitted Development Rights are intact and use of online imagery. The outcome will either be an escalation of priority, or closure of the investigation.

- 5.18 The categorisation focusses on the potential for planning harm which refers to the negative impacts that an unauthorised development may have on amenity, in the public interest. This can involve issues such as impact upon neighbouring or visual amenity, noise, loss of light, harm to highway safety, environmental harm or other safety considerations.
- 5.19 The previous Enforcement Plan priorities and timescales were Level 1 – 5 working days, Level 2 – 20 working days and Level 3 - 30 working days.
- 5.20 The change to the prioritisation categories and timescales enables more serious breaches to be assessed more quickly and efforts concentrated on the most serious breaches of planning control.

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 There is the option to continue to work to the current 2022 Enforcement Plan. However, for the reasons set out within this report, this would not result in the most efficient and effective use of resources.
- 6.2 An enforcement plan is not a statutory requirement and there is therefore the option to no longer work to an approved plan. This would result in a less efficient and transparent way of working which would not result in good customer service. This option is not therefore recommended.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 It is recommended that the Executive approve public consultation on the Draft Enforcement Plan.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A: Equity Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B: Draft Enforcement Plan 2025

Background Papers:

[West Berkshire Enforcement Plan 2022](#)

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>

Considered or reviewed by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees or
associated Task Groups within the preceding six months

☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision

☐

Report is to note only

☐

Wards affected: All

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Planning Service
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Enforcement Plan (2025)
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Existing – updated
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	<p>The Plan sets out the approach to enforcement investigations. If a breach is established and a planning application submitted, appropriate considerations are given to Equality impact and Human rights as part of the application process. This is the same for any decision to take enforcement action as it forms part of the expediency considerations on a case by case basis.</p> <p>Planning Enforcement concerns the use of land, and the enforcement priorities are related to the use of land and not individuals and seeks to achieve a consistency and transparency in decision making. As such, there are no elements of the plan that would indicate disproportionate impacts upon disadvantaged individuals or groups within the community.</p>
Completed By	Laura Callan
Authorised By	
Date of Assessment	10.09.2025

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	An enforcement plan is a recommended approach to planning policy identified by national planning policy practice guidance.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	The update to the policy in the main is regarding the priority for investigation and is related to land use and planning harm with timescales for investigation identified.
Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our	No public consultation has taken place. This plan has been updated from previous policy and the changes have been informed by working practices and cases to which previous policy has been applied.

Equity Impact Assessment

ability to deliver our climate commitments.	
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	<p>This plan has been updated from previous policy and the changes have been informed by working practices and cases to which previous policy has been applied. The absence of an enforcement plan would have greater risk of disproportionate impacts due to lack of a framework to guide investigations and transparency in decision making.</p>

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Areas of deprivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Displaced communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Care experienced people	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The Armed Forces Community	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	10.09.2025
Person Responsible for Review	Laura Callan
Authorised By	

EDI employee related EQiA's should now be sent to Human Resources hrenquiries@westberks.gov.uk

West Berkshire Council

Planning Enforcement Plan – June 2025



Contents

This document sets out how the Council will deal with potential planning breaches.

It provides information and guidance for residents, developers and other interested parties, on how complaints about unauthorised development are handled. It seeks to balance the concerns of local residents with the rights of owners and sets out the priorities and timescales for responding to complaints, carrying out investigations and taking appropriate enforcement action where necessary.

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Planning enforcement plays a key role in upholding the integrity of the planning process and provides an important contribution to maintaining public confidence in the planning system. As the local planning authority, West Berkshire Council has a duty to investigate reports of alleged breaches of planning control, and the discretion to take formal enforcement action where appropriate. This plan sets out the way in which West Berkshire Council will investigate alleged breaches of planning control and how our decisions on enforcement action will be made. The Council aims to provide an efficient and effective planning enforcement service that is focused on protecting the district against harmful development in a way that is clear, consistent and proportionate.
- 1.2 The statutory basis for planning enforcement is contained in Part VII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning Act 2008 (Commencement No 8) and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 4 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024. Enforcement powers available to the Council include the service of Enforcement Warning Notices, Enforcement Notices, Breach of Condition Notices and Stop Notices, as well as the taking of legal proceedings by way of an injunction where appropriate.
- 1.3 Development without planning permission may cause frustration, upset and distress for residents, businesses and visitors to the district. However, to undertake works without first obtaining planning permission is not a criminal offence and the planning legislation specifically allows for the submission of planning applications for development already undertaken. Whilst not in any way condoning wilful breaches of planning control, the Council does not seek to punish people for undertaking works without first obtaining planning permission. There are, however, exceptions where criminal offences arise, including unauthorised works to listed buildings, unlawful advertisements, unauthorised works to trees protected by tree preservation orders, and where there is non-compliance following formal enforcement action.
- 1.4 The use of enforcement powers is guided by the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 60 of the Framework outlines that:
- “Effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. Enforcement action is discretionary, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. They should consider publishing a local enforcement plan to manage enforcement proactively, in a way that is appropriate to their area. This should set out how they will monitor the implementation of planning permissions, investigate alleged cases of unauthorised development and take action where appropriate.”*
- 1.5 All complaints regarding potential breaches of planning regulations are registered on our system and depending on the severity, will be investigated by an officer who, in conjunction with the Planning Support, Enforcement & Developer Contributions Manager, and the Development Management team where appropriate, will decide what action should be taken. Decisions are based on the merits of each individual

case, and enforcement action is taken only when it is considered rational, reasonable, proportionate and expedient.

2. Scope of planning enforcement

2.1 Planning permission is only needed if the work being carried out meets the statutory definition of 'development' which is set out in section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. 'Development' includes:

- building operations (e.g. structural alterations, construction, rebuilding, most demolition);
- material changes of use of land and buildings;
- engineering operations (e.g. groundworks);
- mining operations;
- other operations normally undertaken by a person carrying on a business as a builder.
- subdivision of a building (including any part it) used as a dwellinghouse for use as 2 or more separate dwelling houses

2.2 Planning permission is not required for some categories of work that do not amount to 'development'. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- interior alterations (except mezzanine floors which increase the floorspace of retail premises by more than 200 square metres)
- building operations which do not materially affect the external appearance of a building. The term 'materially affect' has no statutory definition but is linked to the significance of the change which is made to a building's external appearance.
- a change in the primary use of land or buildings, where the before and after use falls within the same use class.

2.3 Development does not in all instances require a planning application to be made for permission to carry out the development. In some cases, development will be permitted under national permitted development rights. Permitted development rights are a national grant of planning permission which allow certain building works and changes of use to be carried out without having to make a planning application. Permitted development rights are subject to conditions and limitations to control impacts and to protect local amenity.

2.4 There may also be a locally granted planning permission in place that covers the type of development, in the form of a Local Development Order, a Neighbourhood Development Order or a Community Right to Build Order.

2.5 In all other cases it will be necessary to make a planning application to the local planning authority.

- 2.6 If development is carried out without the necessary planning permission, this may lead to enforcement action. The Council's Planning Enforcement team investigate alleged breaches of planning control and seek appropriate resolutions.
- 2.7 The Planning Enforcement team also ensure compliance with other associated legislation, including listed building consent and advertisement consent.
- 2.8 The Council's Planning Enforcement Service can investigate alleged breaches of planning control. This typically includes the following:
- Unauthorised building works or engineering works taking place without planning permission;
 - Unauthorised material changes of use of land or buildings without planning permission;
 - Developments not complying with planning permission, including any planning conditions of obligations (this does not include any covenants);
 - Unauthorised works to listed buildings – both internal and external – without listed building consent;
 - Display of unlawful advertisements without advertisement consent;
 - Listed buildings in serious disrepair; and
 - Where the condition/upkeep of buildings or land is adversely affecting the amenity of neighbouring land.
- 2.9 The Council's Planning Enforcement Service is unable to investigate matters as detailed, but not limited to the following:
- Internal works to a non-listed building, as these are not 'development';
 - Boundary wall disputes and other landownership issues as these are civil matters outside of planning legislation;
 - Party Wall Act;
 - Building Regulations compliance;
 - Legal covenants;
 - Devaluation of property;
 - Obstructions, parking, traffic enforcement and any other matters affecting the public highway*;
 - Anti-social behaviour*;
 - Civil neighbour disputes;
 - Dangerous structures that are not listed buildings*;
 - Statutory nuisances, including noise, odour etc.*;
 - Events/potential breaches that may occur in the future.
- 2.10 The Council or Partner Agencies (such as Environmental Health, Environment Agency, Police Force, Housing and Council Tax), have other powers to deal with these issues - please see Useful Contacts in Appendix A of this plan.

3. Principles

- 3.1 West Berkshire Council undertake a firm but rational and reasoned approach to regulation based upon the following principles:

3.1.1 **Proportionality**

Enforcement action will be proportionate to the scale of the alleged breach and the seriousness of the harm caused. We will seek to minimise the costs of compliance by ensuring that any action we take is proportionate to the risks. When it is in the public interest to do so, we may prosecute individuals or organisations who do not comply with any formal notice served on them. When it is appropriate, we also have the option of taking direct action, having regard to the degree of harm and public safety.

3.1.2 **Consistency**

We will take the same approach in similar circumstances, where possible, to achieve results. We will investigate each matter on its own merits. We will also be consistent in how we treat customers.

3.1.3 **Transparency**

We will ensure that everyone involved with cases understands our processes and procedures, including what rights of complaint and appeal may be open to them. We may seek feedback from service users to learn and improve.

3.1.4 **Targeting of enforcement action and raising awareness**

Planning enforcement is a high volume, demand-based service. Consequently, targeted enforcement action is very important. Raising wider general awareness of planning management and enforcement will help to reduce unauthorised works and increase public confidence in our service.

3.1.5 **Accountability**

This local enforcement plan document, which has been agreed by the Planning Portfolio Holder and by the Planning Committee chairs, sets our priorities for action. The success of the policy will be monitored and reviewed regularly.

4. Limits on taking enforcement action

4.1 **Timescales**

Section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act (see also The Planning Act 2008

(Commencement No. 8) and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No.4 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2024) sets out time limits for taking enforcement action. In most cases, development becomes immune from enforcement if no action is taken:

- Within **10 years** of substantial completion for a breach of planning control consisting of operational development, where substantial completion took place on or after 25 April 2024
- Within **10 years** for an unauthorised change of use to a single dwelling house where the change of use took place on or after 25 April 2024
- Within **4 years** of substantial completion for a breach of planning control consisting of operational development where substantial completion took place before 25 April 2024
- Within **4 years** for an unauthorised change of use to a single dwelling house where the change of use took place before 25 April 2024
- Within **10 years** for any other breach of planning control (essentially other changes if use)

After these periods the Council cannot take action and the development becomes lawful. The landowner can apply for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) after this period to regularise the situation. This involves providing evidence that proves on the balance of probability that a breach of planning control has occurred for the relevant time period.

4.2 **Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas**

These are also subject to the provisions of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Carrying out works that affect the special interest of a listed building and the demolition of a building in a conservation area without consent are both criminal offences. Expert heritage advice should be sought if there is any doubt as to whether consent should be obtained and, if in doubt, the council offers a formalised Pre-Application service, before work is undertaken. For listed buildings there is no time limit to taking enforcement action. It is also a criminal offence to carry out unauthorised alterations to a listed building without appropriate permission.

4.3 **Scheduled Monuments**

Although scheduled monument consent is a separate regime, unauthorised works are a criminal offence under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

4.4 **Tree Preservation Orders/Ancient Woodland**

It is a criminal offence to cut down, lop, willfully destroy or damage a protected tree without the Council's consent. The Council can prosecute you for breaching a Tree

Preservation Order and also for damaging or destroying areas of ancient woodland. There is no time limit to taking enforcement action.

4.5 **Adverts**

The display of advertisements is subject to a separate consent process within the planning system. Parties who display an advertisement in contravention of the planning regulations are committing a criminal offence. For example, by displaying an advert without the necessary consent or without complying with the conditions attached to that consent.

4.6 **Minerals and Waste**

Minerals and Waste Enforcement can at times be considered a specialist area of planning control within the Council's development and regulation function and in conjunction with other external agencies. As such, it can sometimes require a different approach to mainstream planning enforcement depending on the circumstances. West Berkshire Council therefore employs specialist officers who should be contacted in the first instance via Minerals@westberks.gov.uk for any help, advice and guidance on monitoring, relevant planning permissions for minerals, waste or Regulation 3 developments and legal agreements attached to minerals and waste sites'.

5. **Making an enforcement complaint**

- 5.1 Complaints about potential breaches of planning control can only be made using the online form on the Council's website. This ensure that sufficient details are included to enable the Council to effectively categorise the complaint/allegation.

<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planning-breach>

The following information is requested:

- An accurate description of the location or address for the site.
- A detailed description of the activities taking place including what harm the alleged breach is causing and/or how it affects you.
- Details of those persons responsible for the alleged breach or the landowners (if known).
- The date and times of when the alleged breach took place including when it first started.
- Any other information or evidence that may be able to assist, e.g. a planning application number; any previous problems/ breaches.
- Your name, address, phone number and e-mail address

- 5.2 All the questions/fields on the form should be completed and where possible photographs should be attached.

- 5.3 The Council will not investigate anonymous complaints. It is important that officers can understand the complaint, identify the harm and make a fair assessment. We also need to prevent malicious and vexatious complaints.
- 5.4 West Berkshire Council staff will treat all parties to a complaint with respect, and we expect the same in return. We appreciate that concerns often involve highly emotive matters, however we have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to abuse of our staff. If we are subject to verbal abuse or any other unacceptable behaviour, we reserve the right to refuse to communicate via telephone and email and will request that all correspondence is in writing via a letter or email sent to the attention of the Planning Support, Enforcement & Developer Contributions Manager. Where a single point of contact will be allocated

We make sure that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. This includes making sure we consider adjustments for people with protected characteristics.

Some people may have difficulty expressing themselves or communicating clearly and/or appropriately. We will always consider the needs and circumstances that we have been made aware of, before deciding how best to manage the situation. This will include making reasonable adjustments. However, this does not mean we will tolerate abusive language, shouting, or other unacceptable behaviour or actions.

5.5 **Confidentiality**

Any details submitted to the Council in relation to an enforcement complaint will be treated with the strictest confidence.

The Council will not reveal the identity of the complaints to the owner or responsible party(s). However, sometimes complainants may be asked to provide evidence to assist further with the matter or for any legal proceedings of the investigation.

In addition, enforcement complaints may be the subject of a Freedom of Information request or if a request is made for all personal data, we hold about a person under the Data Protection Act or Environmental Information Regulations. If such a request is made, we will have to consider the matter for release.

6. **Priorities for planning enforcement investigation**

- 6.1 As indicated, the Planning Enforcement service is a high volume, demand-based service. Therefore, it is important that different types of breach are prioritised in a clear and transparent way. The prioritisation set out below is based upon the significance, urgency and seriousness of a reported breach. The categorisation focusses on the potential for planning harm which refers to the negative impacts that an unauthorised development may have on amenity, in the public interest. This can involve issues such as impact upon neighbouring or visual amenity, noise, loss of light, harm to highway safety, environmental harm or other safety considerations.

- 6.2 All investigations will be carried out thoroughly and accurately in accordance with the following priorities.

<p>Level 1 - Urgent Action (Initial Assessment within 2 working days)</p> <p>Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of substantial and irreversible impacts on the environment or local community. This may include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage or felling of TPO trees; • Ongoing unauthorised works to a listed building or demolition in a conservation area; • Setting up of an unauthorised caravan site where there is an imminent risk of residential occupation; • Developments which result in significant danger to the public; • Failure to produce, agree or comply with a construction phase emergency plan and construction works are continuing.
<p>Level 2 – High Priority (Initial Assessment within 15 working days)</p> <p>Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of significant impacts on the environment, and/or significant public interest. These will be cases which are less immediate than Level 1, but where a prompt response is required. This may include, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaches causing significant pollution or traffic hazards; • Potential harm to listed buildings; • Breaches causing significant ongoing local disturbances; • Breaches of condition on major development sites; • Significant breaches where there is a risk of imminent immunity from enforcement action; • Failure to produce, agree or comply with an operational phase emergency plan.
<p>Level 3 – Standard Priority (Initial Assessment within 40 working days)</p> <p>Alleged/potential breaches of planning control where there is a risk of planning harm. This will be the priority level for the majority of enforcement cases, and will normally include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaches that are likely to remain stable and that are unlikely to give rise to any severe or lasting harm to amenities; • Householder developments; • Fences, walls, gates and other means of enclosure; • Breaches of condition on non-major developments (10 or more dwellings, 1,000sqm or more of floorspace or a site area of 1ha or more); • Unauthorised material changes of use.
<p>Level 4 - Low Priority (Over 40 working days or not expedient to investigate)</p>

Alleged/potential breaches of planning control which are unlikely to result in harm and/or are trivial in nature. For example:

- Satellite dishes and flues;
- Building-mounted solar panels;
- Commercial adverts (not harming public safety);
- Temporary breaches;
- Untidy sites;
- Proactive internal referrals from other services within the Council.

Initial desktop study to include previous planning application(s) and/or enforcement investigation(s), establish if Permitted Development Rights are intact and use of online imagery. The outcome will either be an escalation of priority, or closure of the investigation.

Please note: Officers may re-prioritise cases (both up or down) after completing the initial investigation, or receiving further complaints based upon the nature of the alleged breach and its impact.

7. Service standards and objectives

7.1 We recognise the importance of keeping individuals up to date with our progress. Some investigations can take longer than others, but we will deal with all cases in a rational and transparent way.

7.2 Complainants can expect:

- A written acknowledgement within two working days of the complaint being submitted via the Report a Breach online form. The case will be placed in the relevant priority. The decision on the priority rests with the Planning Support, Enforcement & Developer Contributions Manager. The assessment of priority will be made wholly objectively, irrespective of the nature or status of the party making the complaint.
- Site visits and initial assessments to be undertaken in accordance with the 'Timeline' section below.
- To be informed at key stages of the process, when necessary, e.g. the complainant(s) will be advised if a planning application is invited; when a planning application is received; whether an enforcement notice has been served etc.
- To be informed of the final outcome of their complaint.
- In some cases, we may ask a complainant for further details. If the complainant is unwilling to assist, this may result in the Council not being able to pursue the investigation due to insufficient evidence.
- There are no set timescales for the closure of an enforcement case. Investigations and action can take a long time. However, we will seek to provide an update at each significant stage. Complainants can also email the case officer who will respond in line with Service standards.

7.3 Owners of the land/properties that are the subject of the complaint can expect:

- Clear and open communication on the circumstances of the alleged breach including an explanation of what steps are required to resolve any breach and the possible consequences if those steps are not taken.
- A thorough, objective and impartial investigation of the complaint before a decision is made.
- To be given an opportunity to put things right, along with information on how long they have to do this and the consequences of failing to do so.
- Formal enforcement action to be taken, if necessary and appropriate, or if attempts to negotiate a remedy fail.
- To be informed in writing if the Council decides to proceed to formal enforcement action and what form that will take.
- Information on how to appeal against notices, where applicable.
- To be informed when the investigation is completed and the case is closed.

Investigating possible breaches of planning permission can be stressful for both the party making the complaint as well as the person under investigation. This is partly due to the different ways in which an investigation can progress, and the timescales involved.

To try to ease concerns and assist with the uncertainty, the enforcement officers will provide updates during an investigation if and when there is a significant change/event and when the case is closed/complete. This will normally be in an email.

8. Investigation and assessment of alleged breaches

8.1 Receipt of the complaint

When a complaint is received by the Council it will be subject to initial screening and assigned a priority level between 1 and 4.

The complainant will receive an acknowledgement within two working days of receipt. Planning Enforcement can only investigate breaches of planning control. Our reporting system asks questions about the breach, allows users to upload documents/photographs and can signpost enquiries to the right service or organisation if it is considered the allegation is not a planning matter.

The Council will not investigate persistent complaints which have previously been investigated and resolved or vexatious or malicious complaints.

8.2 Initial assessment

The aim of the initial assessment is to establish whether there has been a breach of planning control and determine the appropriate first response. In most

circumstances, this will include a site visit by the investigating enforcement officer. Once the initial assessment/site visit has been carried out, we will notify the owner or occupier of the subject site, as to whether it falls into the category of a breach of planning control.

If no breach is discovered the case will be closed and relevant parties will be informed and provided with an explanation as to why the case was closed.

Where the nature of extent of a breach is not straightforward, consideration will be given to serving a Planning Contravention Notice (PCN) to ascertain key facts.

For serious breaches of planning control, consideration will be given to serving a Temporary Stop Notice or seeking an Injunction from the High Court.

9. Responses to breaches

Enforcement action should be proportionate to the breach of planning control to which it relates and taken when it is expedient to do so. Whilst wilful breaches of planning law are not condoned, where the balance of public interest lies will vary from case to case.

There is no statutory requirement for the Council to take enforcement action against alleged breaches of planning control. Enforcement action is based on planning merit which requires a planning judgement as to whether formal action is appropriate. In some cases, the Council may decide that enforcement action will not be taken and that an alternative approach is more appropriate (for example a retrospective application, further negotiation, no further action etc).

The following are possible outcomes of the investigation.

9.1 Breach causing no material planning harm

The fact that a breach of planning control has occurred does not automatically mean that formal action will be taken. Some breaches of planning control are minor and therefore cause limited or no planning harm (i.e. if an application were to be submitted it would be unconditionally approved).

In these instances, the Council will use its discretion not to take further action as it would not serve a useful purpose or be a good use of our time and resources. We will however advise the offender of the breach of planning control advising that planning permission is required for the works undertaken and of their right to regularise the development retrospectively under Section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

9.2 Negotiation to find a solution

Resolving breaches of planning control can take a long time, particularly when taking formal enforcement action. The amount of time it takes to resolve a breach of planning control very much depends on the severity of the breach combined with the actions and/or reactions of the landowner(s)/occupier(s). Negotiations can often lead to a quicker resolution and to a better overall outcome.

Where appropriate we will seek to negotiate with the owner/occupier and will consider options to address the planning harm resulting from the breach. The negotiation process may involve voluntary remedial works to remove any unauthorised development, the cessation of any unauthorised uses, or steps to limit any breach to a level where there is no planning harm.

9.3 Invite a Retrospective Planning Application

Upon investigating a breach of planning control, officers will consider the likelihood of planning permission being granted for the development upon application. Where appropriate, we will invite the submission of a planning application in an attempt to regularise the breach of planning control. In determining the application, the council could impose conditions on the planning permission to address the harm being caused by the unauthorised development and/or in order for the council to retain control of the development. This approach allows the planning merits of the development to be fully and openly considered.

Applications for retrospective planning permission are considered in the same way as those for proposed development. Although the Council may invite an application, it cannot be assumed that permission will be granted, and then in doing so the Council does not fetter its discretion prior to the determination of any application for planning permission.

The Council may, where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so, suspend any formal enforcement action whilst a retrospective planning application is being considered. However, where appropriate, the council will not allow the application process to unreasonably delay enforcement proceedings. The Council will consider issuing an Enforcement Warning Notice at this stage.

9.4 Formal Enforcement Action

Almost all formal enforcement action is based on planning merits and can therefore only be taken where the development fails to comply with national and local planning policies. In some cases, it will be necessary for the Council to take formal enforcement action against a breach of planning control. Formal enforcement action will be taken where it is reasonable and justified to do so. Such scenarios may include:

- where negotiation has failed within a reasonable timeframe to resolve the breach of planning control occurring
- where a breach of planning control has a serious harmful impact that it requires formal action

When assessing whether formal action should be taken, the Council will ensure that the action is reasonable, proportionate and is in the public interest in order to achieve a satisfactory result. The Council will consider what the effect of formal action will be and if it will have a meaningful outcome. The term expedient or expediency in planning enforcement relates to the 'planning balance' for taking action. It is a decision taken in accordance with planning policies and material planning considerations, not convenience.

All enforcement action follows an investigation and will be taken in accordance with the scheme of delegation.

The full planning enforcement toolkit is described here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement>

9.5 **Appeal / Court Challenges**

Many forms of formal enforcement action are subject to appeal processes and challenge in the courts. Where necessary, the Council will follow due process to defend its actions and pursue the appropriate remedy of breaches of planning control.

The procedure to be followed in the event of an appeal against a notice, or a court challenge is dictated by the relevant authority (The Planning Inspectorate or the Courts). The Council will endeavour to defend its actions in such cases and, where appropriate, recover any incurred costs resulting from unreasonable behaviour on the part of the appellant through the appeal process.

10. **Compliance**

Once a notice has become effective, the Council will note the compliance date requirement in their systems. A site visit appointment will be carried out to check compliance shortly after the compliance period ends. If at the site visit compliance with a notice is apparent, a letter will be sent to explain that compliance with the notice has been noted on file and the case will be closed.

Where the owner occupier or developer has not fully complied with the requirements of the notice, the Council will proceed with the next stages of the investigation. This will include the consideration of the following options to resolve this breach:

10.1.1 **Prosecution**

We will consider commencing a prosecution in the Courts against any person who has failed to comply with the requirement(s) of any enforcement notice, or Breach of Condition Notice where the date for compliance has passed and the requirements have not been complied with. Prior to commencing with any legal proceedings, we will need to be satisfied that they are in the public interest and that there is enough evidence to offer a realistic prospect of conviction.

Unauthorised adverts and unauthorised works to any tree the subject of a Tree Preservation Order are offences, and we can initiate prosecution without the need to issue a notice.

10.1.2 **Removal Notices (advertisements)**

We will seek removal of any structure used to display an advertisement. Where the notice is not complied with, we may undertake the works and recover the expenses for doing so.

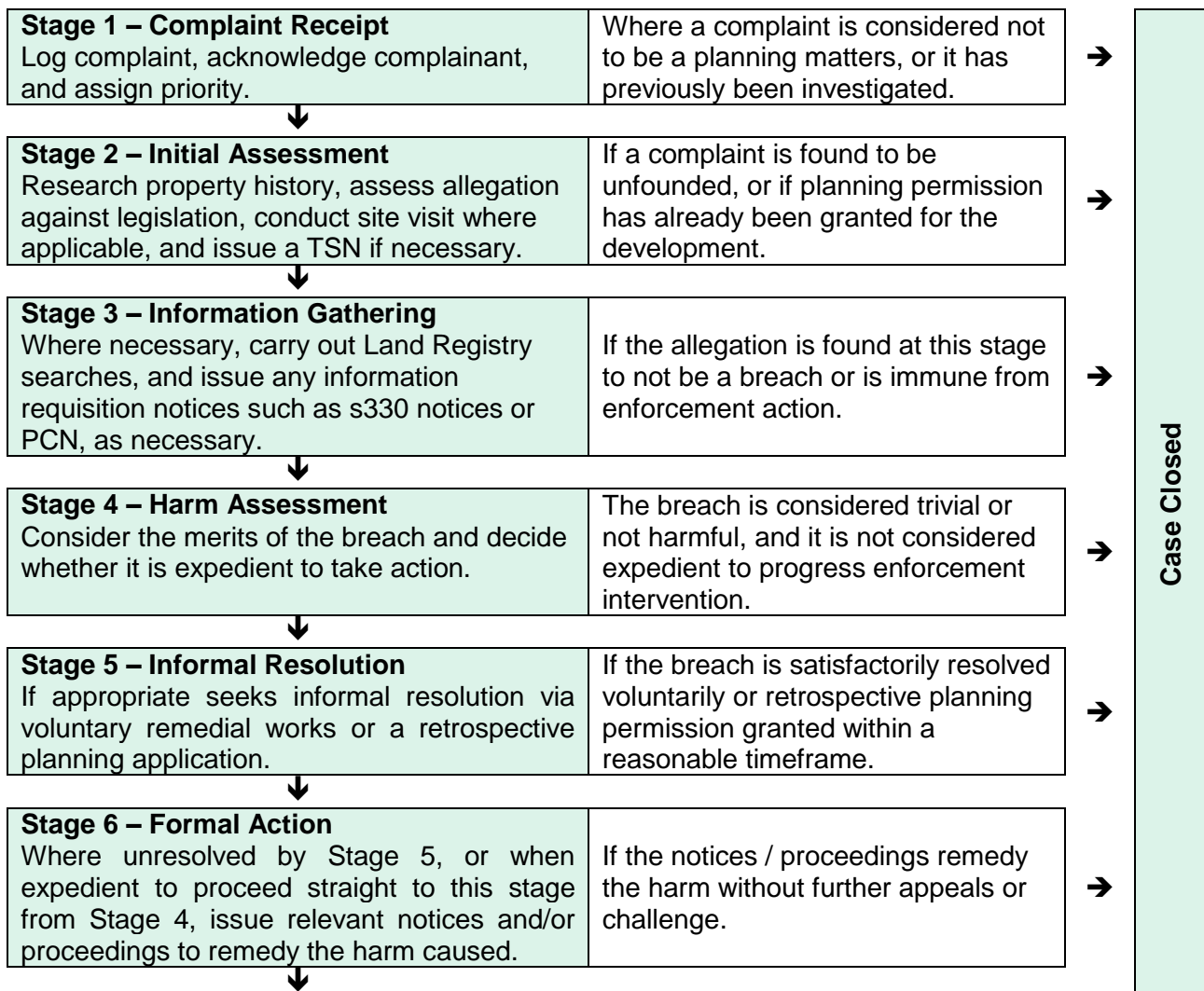
10.1.3 Replacement Notices (trees)

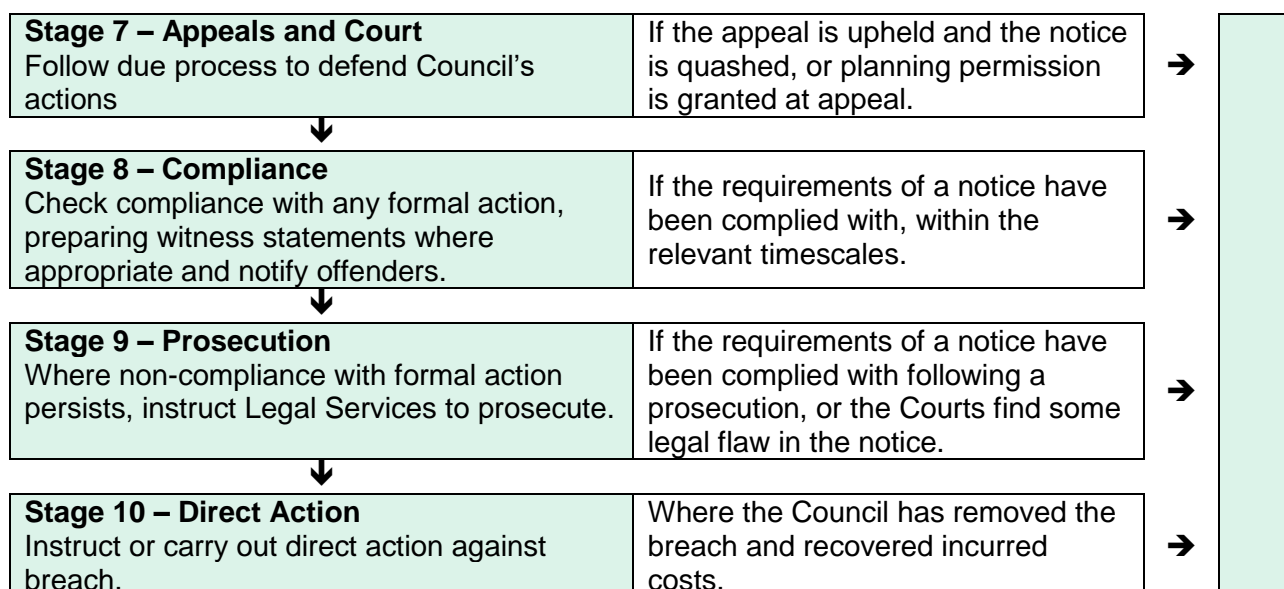
It is open to the Council to issue tree replacement notices, requiring trees to be replanted.

10.1.4 Direct Action

Where the terms of an Enforcement Notice or Section 215 notice have not been met within the compliance period (other than the discontinuance of the use of land), we will consider whether it is expedient to exercise our powers to enter the land and take steps to remedy harm. We would seek to recover from the person who is the owner of the land any expenses reasonably incurred by us in doing so.

10.2 The Enforcement Process





10.3 Proactive Monitoring of Planning Permission

Whilst the responsibility to adhere to planning permissions and comply with associated conditions lies with those undertaking the development, the planning service recognise the importance of addressing harmful breaches of planning control. As a result, where possible and where resources allow, the department may use its own resources and promote cross department liaison to identify breaches of planning control and monitor compliance with conditions imposed on planning permissions, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and Planning Obligations (S106) monitoring.

Local land charges are generally financial charges or restrictions on the use of land which are governmental in character and imposed by public authorities under statutory powers. WBC uses this power to enforce things such as: conditions imposed in a planning permission (these form most charges); Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas; Tree Preservation Orders, Planning and Enforcement Notices. The charge will affect the land rather than the person and if registered correctly, will show up on any search carried out by a person on the land it is registered against.

10.4 Equality

As required as part of the Equality Act 2010 Section 149, in the drafting of this plan due regard has been taken of the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity between different groups and foster good relations between different groups. It is not considered that the Enforcement Plan would conflict with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 or the Council's policy on equality.

11. What to do if you are dissatisfied with the Council's decision

There is no third-party right of appeal within the planning system. Enforcement action is therefore taken at the sole discretion of the Council. An investigation will not normally be re-opened, unless significant further information or evidence is provided, showing compelling reason to review a previous decision. To make a request of this nature you should contact the planning enforcement team in the normal manner, providing any new information you think should be considered.

If you think the Council hasn't followed the correct procedures in coming to their decision, then a complaint about the process can be made using the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure, which can be found here: <https://westberks.gov.uk/complaints>

The subjects of any formal action will have their rights of appeal set out in any enforcement notice they receive.

12. Review of Planning Enforcement Plan

Regular reviews of this enforcement plan will be necessary to ensure it remains current with the most up to date government legislation and guidance. Reviews will therefore be carried out when legislation and guidance changes are introduced or if a high number of enquiries are received about a particular part of the plan from customers. We welcome comments on this Planning Enforcement Plan and any other matter relating to the Enforcement Service.

Please contact:

Planning Support, Enforcement & Developer Contributions Manager
Council Offices, Market Street
Newbury, RG14 5LD

Main Number (01635) 551111

Email planningenforcement@westberks.gov.uk

Specific enquiries relating to a particular case should be referred to the case officer or their immediate line-manager.

Appendix A – Useful Contacts

Department	Contact Information
Report a Breach The link to our online report a breach form, where all details can be logged securely and photographs, documents can be uploaded.	planningservices – Report a Breach
Do I Need Planning Permission The link to find out if proposed development can be considered as Permitted Development.	planningservices . Find out if you need Planning Permission
Building Control The main purpose of Building Control is to ensure that all building work complies with the Building Regulations. Building Control also investigate buildings and other structures which may be dangerous.	Email: help@BCSolutions.org.uk
Environmental Health The team regulate a wide range of activities, and operate to a clear enforcement policy of their own. Public Protection Services consists of those matters enforced by the Trading Standards, Environmental Health and Licensing Services	Email: ehadvice@westberks.gov.uk
Empty Homes Team The main purpose of the empty properties team is to help homeowners, potential investors and neighbours to ensure empty properties are returned to use.	Email: EmptyHomes@WestBerkshire.gov.uk
Highways The highways team co-ordinates and monitors public highways in the District.	Visit https://www.westberks.gov.uk/roadtransportandparking for a list of all the areas the highways team cover
Housing The housing team covers all housing which is not owned by the Council	visit https://www.westberks.gov.uk/housing for a list of services and ways to contact the team specific to your complaint
Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) If you witness a suspected wildlife crime in action call 999 immediately and ask for the police.	For all other enquires call 101. For further information on reporting, or visit https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/partnership-for-action-against-wildlife-crime
Trees The arboricultural service deals with most tree-related issues	Visit https://www.westberks.gov.uk/treesandhedgerows for further information. Email: trees@westberks.gov.uk

Appendices B – Enforcement Glossary

This glossary provides the enforcement options available to the local planning authority.

1. Breach of Condition Notice (BCN)

A breach of conditions notice under Section 187A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires its recipient to secure compliance with the terms of a planning condition or conditions specified by the Local Planning Authority in the notice. There is no right to appeal against this notice and prosecution can be brought in the Magistrates' Court for the offence of contravening a breach of condition notice.

2. Deault Powers

The Council may enter the land and take the necessary action to secure compliance when enforcement notices are in effect. This is only used in extreme cases and when resources allow. The Council will seek to recover all costs associated with carrying out the works in default.

3. Discontinuance Notice

Where a person has displayed an advertisement with deemed consent that the authority is satisfied causes a substantial injury to the amenity of the area or is a danger to members of the public, a discontinuance notice can be served under Regulation 8 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 seeking the removal of the advert.

A local planning authority may take discontinuance action if it is satisfied that such action is necessary to remedy a substantial injury to the amenity of the locality or a danger to members of the public. As "substantial injury" to the amenity of the locality is a more rigorous test than the "interests" of amenity, local planning authorities will need to justify this in their statement of reasons.

4. Enforcement Warning Notice

An enforcement warning notice formalises the process for a local planning authority to invite a retrospective planning application.

Under section 172ZA of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, where a local planning authority considers that unauthorised development has a reasonable prospect of being acceptable in planning terms, it can issue an enforcement warning notice. The notice will set out the matters that appear to be a breach of planning control and state that, unless an application is made by a specified date, further enforcement action may

be taken.

The issue of an enforcement warning notice constitutes taking enforcement action for the purposes of section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

5. Injunction

This involves seeking an order from the court preventing an activity or operation from taking place. Failure to comply with the requirements of an injunction amounts to a criminal offence.

6. Listed Building Enforcement Notice

A Listed Building enforcement notice under Section 38 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 will require the recipient to secure compliance with the terms of the notice. Works to listed buildings without consent is a criminal offence and prosecution may occur alongside the enforcement notice, subject to severity/context. There is a right of appeal of this notice

7. Negotiation

Negotiation is encouraged in all but the most serious cases as the best way to resolve a breach and in some cases can be more expedient than issuing an enforcement notice.

8. Planning Contravention Notice (PCN)

This is a notice which allows the Council to collect evidence which will help to determine if a breach is taking place and the next steps. The owner and/or person responsible have 21 days to respond and failure to do this may result in prosecution

9. Planning Enforcement Order

Where a person deliberately conceals unauthorised development, the deception may not come to light until after the time limits for taking enforcement action (Section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) have expired. A planning enforcement order enables the Council to take action in relation to an apparent breach of planning control notwithstanding that the time limits may have expired.

10. Prosecution

It is a criminal offence not to comply with the requirements of a statutory notice, to display an advertisement without consent or undertake works to a listed building without consent. The Council can prosecute or formally caution.

11. Section 172 Enforcement Notices

The enforcement notice allows the Council to formally require a breach of planning control to be remedied. Government guidance states that

enforcement notices should only be served when expedient to do so. Failure to comply within the specified timeframe is a criminal offence which can lead to prosecution proceedings. Enforcement notices can be appealed, and the Planning Inspectorate can decide to uphold the notice, amend it or have it quashed.

12. Section 215 Notices

Where the condition of land or a building is adversely affecting the amenity of a neighbourhood the Council may issue a Notice under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, requiring the owner or occupier to remedy the condition of the land or building. Failure to comply with the Notice is a criminal offence. The Council has powers, where a Notice has not been complied with, to enter the land and carry out the work itself and recover the costs from the owner.

13. Stop Notice

This can be used in conjunction with an enforcement notice where the breach of planning control is causing serious harm and should only be used in extreme cases. In such cases where stop notices are issued the Council may be liable to pay compensation if it is later decided that the stop notice was not appropriate. For these reasons, serious consideration needs to be given to the appropriateness of serving a stop notice.

14. Temporary Stop Notice

These are similar to stop notices but take effect immediately from the moment they are displayed on a site and last for up to 28 days. A temporary stop notice would be issued only where it is appropriate that the use or activity should cease immediately because of its effect on (for example) amenity, the environment or public safety. It may be issued even when planning permission has been granted for development, for example, in a case where the developer is not complying with conditions attached to the permission.

15. Urgent Works Notice

This is a notice under Section 54 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 that applies to unoccupied listed buildings in serious disrepair. It enables the Council to order urgent works to preserve the building, for example to make it weather tight and secure. If the notice is not complied with the Council may carry out the works in default and recover the costs from the owner.

Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement

Committee considering report:	Council
Date of Committee:	27 November 2025
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Tom McCann
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	C4536

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Public Protection Partnership Service was subjected to a peer review which concluded earlier in the year. In line with the negotiations on the recommendations of the review, the report seeks authorisation for West Berkshire Council to enter into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31st March 2029 and that Wokingham Borough Council becomes a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements.

2 Recommendations

That the Executive approves the following recommendations following the peer review:

- 2.1 West Berkshire Council enters into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31st March 2029.
- 2.2 That the Executive delegates its public protection related functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee until the 31st March 2029.
- 2.3 That the agreement includes an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice to give effect to leaving the agreement on the 31st March in any given year.
- 2.4 West Berkshire Council continues to be the host authority.
- 2.5 That the Service Lead for Public Protection in conjunction with the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to enter into this agreement.
- 2.6 Wokingham Borough Council becomes a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements and that the terms be based on those set out in the original shared service agreement of the 6th January 2017.
- 2.7 That the Executive recommends to full Council that the Terms of Reference and relevant sections of the Constitution (Part 3.1 Appendix JPPC and Part 6.5 Council Bodies

Rules) be amended to reflect the revised Governance arrangements set out in recommendation 2.6 above.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<p>The agreements will be amended within existing budgets and there are no budgetary implications associated with the production of this report.</p> <p>The peer review team concluded that the Service is focussed and effective in providing statutory regulatory services to protect residents. It also concluded that as a shared service it is delivering efficiencies and greater service resilience than individual authorities would be able to achieve.</p> <p>The critical mass delivered by the shared service allows for it to access significant amounts of grant funding (currently around £400K per annum) as well as share cost bases with other authorities outside of the PPP e.g. financial investigation work, complex investigations, case management functions and other specialist functions such as animal feeding stuffs.</p> <p>In addition to the potential loss of grant funding it is estimated that an injection of around £250K would be needed to re-instate a stand-alone in-house service if operational capacity was not to be lost. This includes management costs of around £200K (including re-instating the Service Lead role), ICT costs and other licensing costs or around £50K.</p>
Human Resource:	<p>This report was drafted within existing resources. Support is being sought from colleagues in the legal team to draft the revised agreements.</p> <p>West Berkshire will remain the employing and administrative authority under the proposals.</p> <p>A decision to disaggregate the service would require a protracted HR process including full consultation with staff followed by TUPE transfer to individual partner authorities. The disruption will inevitably lead to the loss of some staff through retirement or seeking alternative roles. This may exacerbate the resource / skill challenges that will potentially arise from the loss of economies of scale.</p>
Legal:	<p>The basis of the proposed shared service arrangements are delegations of both Executive and Council functions to a Joint</p>

	<p>Committee and the basis for employment of the staff is Section 113 of the Local Government Act 1972 which allows a local authority to enter into an agreement with another Council for the placing at the disposal of the latter for the purposes of their functions. This is in line with the existing arrangements.</p> <p>The current Inter Authority Agreement that underpins the service are due to expire in January 2027. The existing agreement with Wokingham ends on the same date. It is proposed that the partner authorities (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council) enter into a new three authority agreement until the 31st March 2029. It is proposed that the agreement include an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice.</p>			
Risk Management:	<p>A full peer review of the service been conducted to provide assurance and confidence around the quality and level of shared service provided to ensure residents are receiving a comprehensive public protection service.</p> <p>There would be the potential for significant financial costs should disaggregation of the service take place at the end of the current agreements in January 2027.</p> <p>In addition, a decision to disaggregate the service would require a protracted HR process including full consultation with staff followed by TUPE transfer to individual partner authorities. The disruption will inevitably lead to the loss of some staff through retirement or seeking alternative roles. This may exacerbate the resource / skill challenges that will potentially arise from the loss of economies of scale.</p>			
Property:	<p>There is no property implications associated with this report. The Service will continue to operate out of the Theale Gateway Office as well the office buildings of the partner authorities.</p>			
Policy:	<p>There are no direct policy implications arising from this report.</p>			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				

Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement

A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		✓		Full EQiA was conducted when shared arrangements/contract was entered into in 2017 and remains valid.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		✓		See above
Environmental Impact:		✓		This decision will not have any direct environmental impact.
Health Impact:		✓		This decision will not have any direct health impact.
ICT Impact:		✓		There are no IT implications associated with this report.
Digital Services Impact:		✓		There are no digital services impacts associated with this decision albeit that the online iteration of the Constitution will need updating should full Council approve the changes to it..
Council Strategy Priorities:	✓			Services we are proud of by continuing to support our customers through ongoing delivery of the Public Protection Partnership Service Plans.
Core Business:		✓		There will be no changes to the way services are delivered to our customers under the new agreements.
Data Impact:				The proposal will not have any impact on our data subjects.

Consultation Engagement:	and	<p>Variations of this report have been considered and agreed by the Cabinet/Executive in Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough Councils.</p> <p>Further iterations will be considered at Full Council in both authorities too.</p> <p>All Member of all three authorities and all PPP staff were consulted during the peer review.</p>
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Public Protection Partnership (PPP) is a shared service delivering Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards functions on behalf of two authorities (Partners), Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Council. It also currently shares a range of services with Wokingham Borough Council including trading standards, financial investigations, intelligence functions, animal health and welfare and case management work and the technical delivery of air quality monitoring and reporting.
- 4.2 The Service is underpinned by two Inter Authority Agreements (IAAs), one with Bracknell Forest Council and a separate agreement signed in 2022 with Wokingham Borough Council. The current agreements are due to expire in January 2027. The IAAs require a review of the Service prior to the end date for the current agreements. A peer review was therefore conducted between October 2024 and January 2025.
- 4.3 The review team concluded that the Service is focussed and effective in providing statutory regulatory services to protect residents. It also concluded that as a shared service it is delivering efficiencies and greater service resilience than individual authorities would be able to achieve. The review made a series of recommendations for all three partner authorities (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Councils) to consider including renewing the current agreements.
- 4.4 Due to the ongoing uncertainties arising from local government reorganisation, it is proposed to effectively extend the current arrangements until March 2029 rather than the ten years proposed by the review team.
- 4.5 In line with the recommendations of the review, the report seeks authorisation for West Berkshire Council to enter into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31st March 2029 and that Wokingham Borough Council becomes a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 The Public Protection Partnership (PPP) is a shared service delivering Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards functions on behalf of two authorities (Partners), Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Council.
- 5.2 It also currently shares a range of services with Wokingham Borough Council including trading standards, financial investigations, intelligence functions, specialist litigation, animal health and welfare and case management work and the technical delivery of air quality monitoring and reporting.
- 5.3 The vision of the Service is to protect and support residents and legitimate businesses through the successful use of information and intelligence, delivering safe and healthy neighbourhoods. The nature of the shared service means that it has greater resilience and robustness to cope with unforeseen challenges such as disease outbreaks or large-scale investigations.
- 5.4 West Berkshire Council signed up to the current shared service agreement in [January 2017](#) and since that time the shared service arrangement has served its residents well and the Service has become well established within this Council and within the partner authorities. It has met all the aims of the [original business case](#) including significant cost savings, resilience, critical mass and the ability to develop specialisms. There are parts of the Service, particularly around trading standards, investigations, case management and specialisms such as financial investigations that simply would not ever be viable to deliver at single unitary authority level. Beyond this the whole of the Service has benefited from critical mass.
- 5.5 The 2017 arrangements changed in 2022 when Wokingham Borough Council left the original agreement and the Committee governance arrangements. They did however enter into a new shared service arrangement for those functions set out above. The basis of the arrangement was delegation of the operational functions to the service management and oversight of the delivery through the Joint Management Board on which they remained.
- 5.6 The Inter Authority Agreements that underpin the Service require a review of the Service prior to the end date for the current agreements. The IAAs also set out timeframes for the disaggregation of the Service should any of the partner authorities decide not to recommission the current services.
- 5.7 The existing shared service arrangements are due to end on the 8th January 2027. Additionally, the 2022 agreement between Wokingham Borough and the Partnership for the commissioned services ends on the same day.

Peer Review

- 5.8 A peer review of the existing Public Protect Partnership arrangements was undertaken between October 2024 and January 2025. The review team concluded that the current Service is focussed and effective in providing statutory regulatory services to protect residents. It also concluded that as a shared service it is delivering efficiencies and

greater service resilience than individual authorities would be able to achieve. The review made a series of recommendations for all three partner authorities (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Councils) to consider. A full summary of the findings of the review can be found here: [Peer Review Recommendations](#)

- 5.9 The headline finding from the review was that the shared service arrangements had met the original business case outcomes including resilience, reduction in overhead costs, greater access to develop expertise and economies of scale. The review praised the policy framework that sat around the service and how, notably, it had evaluated and identified the priority areas through its Strategic Assessment.
- 5.10 In terms of areas for improvement the team suggested that Wokingham Borough Council should be permitted to rejoin the governance arrangements at member level and Wokingham Borough Council members and officers have indicated that they wish to do so. The review also recommended that until such time Wokingham members should be able to attend JPPC and contribute to issues for services that it shares with the other two councils. Which they have been doing.
- 5.11 This Service is currently governed through a Joint Management Board attended by nominated Lead Officers from each of the Partner Authorities (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Councils) as well as officers from the PPP.
- 5.12 The Joint Public Protection Committee was established to oversee the strategic leadership of the PPP, and it currently comprises three members from Bracknell Forest Council and three from West Berkshire Council. West Berkshire Council is the host authority for the PPP, and it is therefore governed under the host authority's constitution and meeting procedures.
- 5.13 The review made a series of recommendations for the partner authorities to consider most notably that in light of its findings, the partner Councils should seek to enter into a new three-way agreement incorporating the revised governance arrangements for a period of ten years.
- 5.14 However, during the course of the review the government announced its proposals for devolution and local government reorganisation. This included seeking to build a unitary authority structure for the whole of England based on a proposed minimum authority size of around 500K population. This would be overlaid with a series of strategic authorities. There is no plan to look at existing unitary councils within the lifetime of this parliament. However West Berkshire Council have submitted a proposal to government to merge with two Oxfordshire District Councils as an option for the unitary solution for Oxfordshire which is currently a two-tier administrative area.
- 5.15 Given the uncertainty caused by local government reorganisation the partners, whilst acknowledging that a ten-year agreement is desirable considered that there is too much uncertainty at this time to enter into such an agreement. This left two feasible alternatives. The first being that the shared service arrangements end on the expiry of the current agreements (January 2027). The second proposal is that the partner councils seek to enter into an agreement for a shorter term with an option to extend and the insertion of appropriate exit clauses to deal with any eventuality. After a series of discussions led by the Service Lead the preferred position of all three Councils is to sign

a new agreement until the 31st March 2029 which allows for a much clearer picture to emerge.

- 5.16 The Cabinet/Executive at both Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council have considered and agreed to enter into a new three authority agreement until the 31st March 2029. They have also agreed that the partners should not wait for the expiry of the existing agreements but enter into the new arrangement as soon as practically possible.
- 5.17 All three councils will also be considering elements of the proposal at their full Council meetings at the end of November 2025. If agreed Wokingham will rejoin the Committee at the December meeting of the Joint Public Protection Committee.

Proposals

- 5.18 It is therefore proposed that the Executive consider the recommendations as set out in Section 2 of this report. These include entering into a new three authority agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31st March 2029. While full Council must agree the constitutional changes it is recommended that the Executive endorses the proposals set out below.

Proposed Governance Arrangements

- 5.19 The basis of the governance arrangements will be that each Executive and each Council will delegate the public protection functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee. The Committee will then have full responsibility for setting priorities, overseeing policy development and holding the service to account for performance including financial performance. There will also be a Joint Management Board consisting of a Senior Manager from each partner authority who will be responsible for ensuring the direction set by the Committee is implemented. Finally, there will be the service management team who will oversee the day-to-day operational delivery of the service and through whom all staff engaged on service delivery will be accountable to the Board and the Committee.
- 5.20 Arrangements of this type inevitably mean that ownership for policy setting and oversight is shared, and each authority will have their own arrangements for ensuring oversight of the service from corporate perspective.
- 5.21 It is also proposed that the terms of reference of the Joint Public Protection Committee, and the associated sections of the Constitution (Part 3.1 Appendix JPPC and Part 6.5 Council Bodies Rules) be amended as follows to amend the Membership of the Committee:

Membership

The JPPC shall comprise of ~~six~~ **nine** [insert] Members, three from each of BFC, WBC **and Wokingham Borough Council** [insert] as follows:

- 4.1.1 The Executive/Cabinet Member with responsibility for Public Protection Services (appointed by the Leader of the respective council);

- 4.1.2 Two additional Members (appointed by each Council at its respective Annual Meeting or in the event of a vacancy) reflecting the political balance of the individual Council.

Chairman and Vice-Chairman

The JPPC shall appoint one of its Members to be Chairman ~~and one to be Vice Chairman~~ of the JPPC on an annual basis (or in the event of a vacancy) ~~at the first meeting of the Municipal Year. who shall continue in office until their successor becomes entitled to act.~~

~~The Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship of the JPPC shall rotate between the Councils on an annual basis, with each post being held by a different Council.~~

[insert]

Quorum

The quorum of a Meeting shall be ~~two~~ **three** [insert].

At least one Executive Member from each Council must be present for the meeting to be quorate.

- 5.22 The functions of the Council and Executive that will not be delegated to the Committee include setting of fees and charges, determining any revenue and capital budget allocation for the provision of the service and all licensing functions. The latter will remain Council functions discharged through the Licensing Committee.

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 Not to renew the partnership. This was discounted given the efficiencies and greater service resilience resulting from being in the partnership.
- 6.2 The savings from shared services arise from sharing the costs of management as well as systems such as ICT and subscriptions such as legal subscriptions etc. In addition, the critical mass that the shared service provides allows for it to access significant amounts of grant funding (currently around £400K per annum) as well as share cost bases with other authorities outside of the PPP e.g. financial investigation work, complex investigations, case management functions and other specialist functions such as animal feeding stuffs.
- 6.3 It is estimated that an injection of around £250-£300K would be needed to re-instate a stand-alone in-house service if operational capacity was not to be lost. This includes management costs of around £200K (including re-instating the Service Lead role), ICT costs and other licensing costs or around £50K and then lost grant income would need to be factored in. There will also likely be capital / project costs associated with system and data migration and set up and revenue programme costs associated with managing the disaggregation. More importantly all of the benefits arising from the original business case would be lost.
- 6.4 In addition, a decision to disaggregate the service would require a protracted HR process including full consultation with staff followed by TUPE transfer to individual

partner authorities. The disruption will inevitably lead to the loss of some staff through retirement or seeking alternative roles. This may exacerbate the resource / skill challenges that will potentially arise from the loss of economies of scale. Should reorganisation ultimately effect BFC this would mean the staff going through this process twice in quick succession. The timing of this extension allows for a much clearer picture and set of options to emerge.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Peer Review concluded that the PPP has and continues to be “effective in providing statutory regulatory services to protect residents whilst also delivering efficiencies and greater service resilience. The service has also been successful in securing significant income from both external and internal partners to protect both residents and local businesses. The service is performing well and delivering high quality outcomes for residents and business across the three partner councils.
- 7.2 Members across all three councils that participated in peer review survey recognised “the importance of the service and appreciate how it affects the lives of residents whilst also supporting local council priorities.”
- 7.3 The review also established that “There was no desire from any partner to withdraw any services from the partnership and indeed there was a recognition that withdrawal and working independently would increase costs, reduce available expertise and undermine service resilience.”
- 7.4 There are significant efficiencies to be gained from sharing management costs which allow for more resource to be focussed on operational delivery. There are also the non-financial tangible benefits that the Peer Review identified had been delivered including critical mass, flexibility, expertise, focus and non-staffing related cost effectiveness e.g. IT contracts and subscriptions etc. There is also the access to attract large amounts of grant funding that an individual authority may be unable to do. The alternate to this arrangement is disaggregation that could come at significant cost and instability. Previous experience from the 2022 disaggregation indicates the short terms costs could be significant, and recurring costs could be in the order of £250K if current levels of operational delivery are to be maintained. It could also mean staff are subject to two reorganisations under two years.
- 7.5 It is therefore proposed that the recommendations as set out in Section 2 be adopted and the governance arrangements will be those outlined in 5.19 to 5.22 above.
- 7.6 Should these proposals be approved Council will be asked to extend the delegations of its functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee until 31st March 2029 and to agree any associated changes to the constitution.

8 Appendices

None

Background Papers:

[Peer Review Recommendations](#)

[PPP Strategic Assessment 2024-27](#)

[14 October 2025 Report to Bracknell Forest Council Cabinet Meeting](#)

[16 October 2025 Report to Wokingham Borough Council Executive Meeting](#)

Subject to Call-In: Yes: ☐ No: ☒

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☒

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by one of the Council's Scrutiny Committees or associated Task Groups within the preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

Name: Sean Murphy
Job Title: Service Lead: Public Protection
Tel No: 01635 519840
E-mail: sean.murphy@westberks.gov.uk

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Executive – 6 November 2025

Item 11 – Member Questions

To follow

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