

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 18 DECEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Heather Codling (Vice-Chairman), Iain Cottingham, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Tom McCann and Justin Pemberton

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Howard Woollaston, David Marsh, Adrian Abbs 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), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Thomas Radbourne (Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Patrick Clark, Vicky Poole, and Carolyne Culver

PART I

1. Minutes

It was noted that Councillor Howard Woollaston had been in attendance at the meeting on 12 November 2025.

The Minutes of the meetings held on 6 and 12 November 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. Public Questions

Councillor Jeff Brooks explained that in the future public questions and answers would be published centrally and accessible on the Council's website. It was noted that records would cover a two-year period and that members of the public may be referred to the online database for a response should a question be sufficiently similar to one previously asked.

Councillor Brooks further emphasised that to avoid rejection, members of the public should present concise, relevant questions and not statements of opinion.

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

4. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

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5. **Devolution - Expression of Interest: Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority Expression of Interest (EX4747)**

Councillor Justin Pemberton introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 6), which sought approval to submit an Expression of Interest to Government in response to the Government's devolution policy following Full Council support at its meeting on 27 November 2025.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried whether more money should be assigned to the scheme, or whether there should be a delay, given that the Government had recently announced a delay to 2028 for the elections of four other Mayoral Strategic Authority's.

Councillor Dominic Boeck acknowledged that the proposal was broadly supported but queried the measurable benefits for children and particularly the most vulnerable children within the district and requested that if such benefit could not be demonstrated that the Executive bring the proposal back to full Council after formal Scrutiny and before the matter proceeded further.

Councillor Clive Taylor supported that the proposal should be reviewed by a Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Jeff Brooks responded that a comprehensive submission would be prepared towards the latter part of 2026 and would be reviewed by a Scrutiny Committee and Council at that time.

Councillor Justin Pemberton confirmed his willingness for the matter to come through Scrutiny Committee and emphasised that the current stage was an expression of interest, with further process and member engagement to follow as details became clearer. He also highlighted the opportunity for more joined-up working in education and the need to support the process with appropriate funding.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that:

- That Executive is informed of the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions, and agrees to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date
- That the Executive agrees that that an informal Devolution Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.
- That the Executive approves the Expression of Interest (EOI) to submit to Government, noting that the EOI is designed to proactively position the Thames Valley for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme.
- That Executive supports that a further report will be brought to Council and Executive prior to any final decision on the creation of a Strategic Authority

6. **Finance Improvement Plan (EX4746)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 7), which requested approval of the Financial Improvement Plan and associated Financial Improvement Group which had been developed to provide an overarching approach, with supporting themes, to address the Council's financial position and reliance upon Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

Councillor Cottingham highlighted the inclusion of an organisational chart (page 50 of the agenda pack), which detailed the reporting lines and the proposed Financial Improvement Group's interaction with the Financial Review Panel, Spend Panel, and

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other governance boards. He stated that the Council would leverage external expertise, including two independent non-executive members, to provide insight and improve processes.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the independent Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) report and queried why it had been commissioned and whether the administration accepted its conclusions.

Joseph Holmes, the Chief Executive, responded that the external review was commissioned to provide an unbiased assessment, as required when seeking EFS, and that CIPFA was the leader in such reviews for local authorities.

Councillor Mackinnon queried whether the administration accepted specific conclusions from the CIPFA report, including statements about the Council's perilous financial position; a perception within the Council that the application for EFS obviated the need to address the structural gap; that existing savings plans were short term; and that relationships between Members and officers were blurred. Councillors Jeff Brooks and Cottingham responded that whilst they respected the report, they did not agree with any of those conclusions and explained that some of the report's findings were based on information available at the time, which had since changed.

Councillor Mackinnon queried the Draft Delivery Plan's timescales which referenced Quarter Three the following year. Councillor Cottingham stated that the Plan's completion dates were initial proposals subject to review by the Financial Improvement Group.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that as so many of the CIPFA findings had either been rejected or obfuscated the Executive's response was a 'disgrace' and he suggested the Executive should resign.

Councillor Brooks rebutted the comment and suggested that the previous administration's overspends and depletion of reserves were responsible for the current problems.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried whether the Council would need to hold a referendum to increase council tax above the statutory maximum. Councillor Cottingham confirmed that the administration would not pursue a referendum and highlighted the negative impact of the government's recent funding formula on the Council's finances.

Councillor David Marsh agreed with concerns raised about the impact of the funding formula and the pressures on council services and queried the role of transformation in the improvement plan, the reporting arrangements for the new group, and whether the constitution would be updated to reflect creation of the Financial Improvement Group. Councillor Cottingham responded that transformation was embedded across the organisation and that regular reporting of the Financial Improvement Group to the Executive and Scrutiny would be undertaken.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report, noting that councils throughout the country were facing unprecedented levels of demand and financial pressure and that the Council's funding outcome had compounded the situation.

RESOLVED that:

- To inform the members that the Council is responding to the CIPFA resilience review.
- For the Executive to approve the Financial Improvement Plan and associated Financial Improvement Group.

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7. **Building Control Assurance and Update Report (EX4739)**

Councillor Tom McCann introduced a report (Agenda Item 8), which provided an update on the provision of the shared Building Control Service and recent developments in the sector.

RESOLVED that: Executive is informed of the matters set out in the report.

8. **Youth Council for West Berkshire (EX4750)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9) which set out proposals for the establishment of a Youth Council for West Berkshire in order to give young people a voice in local decision making.

Councillor Codling highlighted that the Youth Council would require dedicated officer support, with two staff members attending each meeting and managing activities such as elections, team building and annual conferences. It was noted that with an estimated 21 meetings per year, this would equate to one full-time officer, and consequently recruitment was planned. Councillor Codling suggested that the creation of the Youth Council would yield the long-term benefits for democratic engagement within the district.

Councillor Stuart Gourley expressed strong support for the proposal, noting the importance of engaging younger residents and bringing diverse perspectives to the Council.

Councillor David Marsh confirmed support for the proposal and raised several questions. He queried why the item was brought to the Executive rather than Full Council and requested a commitment that it would be brought to Full Council for wider Member input. He also queried whether the Spend Panel was likely to agree to the appointment of a new officer and whether the Youth Council would continue if a new unitary authority was established.

Councillor Codling responded that approval for the appointment had already been confirmed and that the Youth Council could continue under a new authority structure, subject to advice at the time. Councillor Jeff Brooks clarified that the item was an Executive function and that there was a desire to proceed without delay but suggested a debate could be organised at Full Council once the Youth Council was established.

Councillor Adrian Abbs raised concerns regarding the financial implications for the full cost of running the Youth Council. Councillor Brooks responded that the estimated cost was approximately £30,000–£40,000 and emphasised the importance of the initiative despite financial pressures.

Councillor Clive Taylor recalled the existence of a previous Youth Council and queried why it had ceased, whether lessons had been learned, and whether young people would chair meetings. Councillor Codling clarified that the previous Youth Council ended due to short-term post-COVID funding, and that the new Youth Council would be run by young people with officer support and training.

Councillor Dominic Boeck queried why the report had not been brought to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, given its relevance. Councillor Brooks responded that the decision was made to bring to Executive for expediency.

Councillor Tom McCann asked about the support that would be provided to Youth Council members to help them understand the Council's functions and statutory duties. Councillor Codling confirmed that training would be provided and that young people would be encouraged to bring forward ideas and would learn about statutory and legal constraints as part of the process.

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Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report, and emphasised the need to involve young people in politics and community life

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Agree to establish a Youth Council.
- Approves the draft terms of reference and code of conduct as set out in Appendices C and D, which will be presented to the Youth Council following its creation for review and adoption (subject to any amendments).

9. **Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report (EX4757)**

Councillor Nigel Foot introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 10) which provided a response to the Task and Finish Group report and recommendations presented to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2025 which sought to determine whether there was a strategically and financially sound business case for the Monks Lane Sports Hub, whether the project was well managed, and whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.

Councillor Foot thanked members of the Task and Finish Group, chaired by Councillor Culver and highlighted that the majority of recommendations had been agreed or accepted by the Council. Councillor Foot also referenced recommendation four regarding the recording of hours spent on capital projects by business-as-usual staff, explaining that this was partially agreed and that the Council was considering how best to record officers' time in a fit-for-purpose manner.

Councillor Adrian Abbs noted that whilst there was extensive information about the recommendations, there was less clarity on whether the original objectives had been met, such as determining whether the Sports Hub project was value for money. Councillor Jeff Brooks explained that it was not the Executive's report.

Councillor David Marsh, as a member of the Task and Finish Group, welcomed the Executive's acceptance of many recommendations. He queried the use of the phrase 'in place' in the responses, commenting that the recommendations would not have been made if they were already in place. Councillor Brooks confirmed that actions were now in place.

Councillor Marsh referred specifically to recommendation seven, regarding partnership with local groups, and queried whether the Council would consider working with community football groups, for example by offering a long-term lease on Faraday Road and leveraging external funding. Councillor Foot responded that the Council was happy to work in partnership with local groups, provided there was a robust business case.

Councillor Marsh referred to recommendation twenty-two, regarding contradictory advice given during the Monks Lane project and whether the Council believed the issue had been resolved. Councillor Brooks responded that the chronology of meetings and decisions had been considered by the courts, and that the focus should now be on project management learnings rather than revisiting past events.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive considers the proposed responses to the recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee as set out at 5.4 and agrees the responses and to undertake the following actions:

- Strengthening the Projects service to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council's project management methodology to ensure that key projects are

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governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.

- Undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
- Embed the output of this review through training for all who have roles within project delivery (i.e. PMs, sponsors)
- Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the finance quarterly monitoring reports to the Executive
- Review how time recording can be implemented and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
- Share the recommendations of this Sports Hub Task and Finish Group and the LRIE Task and Finish Group of 2020 with the Chairman of the Project Management Task and Finish Group and log the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group the report in the central Corporate Programme Office repository.

10. 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 8.20 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature