

Notice of Meeting



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Executive

Thursday 18 December 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 10 December 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



Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday 18 December 2025 (continued)

| | |
|------------|--|
| 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

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| 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 meetings of the Executive held on 6 and 12 November 2025. | 7 - 16 |
| 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 . | 17 - 18 |
| 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. | 19 - 20 |
| 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. | 21 - 22 |

Items as timetabled in the Forward Plan

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| 6. Devolution - Expression of Interest: Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority Expression of Interest (EX4747) Purpose: the report seeks Executive approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government in response to the Government's devolution policy following Full Council support at its meeting on 27 November 2025. | 23 - 44 |
| 7. Finance Improvement Plan (EX4746) Purpose: the Council is pro-actively responding to the financial position that it, and many other Councils across the country, faces. The report sets out the Finance Improvement Plan, the external assurance review and implementation of a Finance Improvement Group to provide even greater focus on the Council's finances. | 45 - 66 |



Agenda - Executive to be held on Thursday 18 December 2025 (continued)

8. **Building Control Assurance and Update Report (EX4739)** 67 - 78
Purpose: the report aims to update the Executive on the provision of the shared Building Control Service and recent developments in the sector.
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9. **Youth Council for West Berkshire (EX4750)** 79 - 112
Purpose: the report sets out proposals for the establishment of a Youth Council for West Berkshire in order to give young people a voice in local decision making.
-
10. **Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report (EX4757)** 113 - 164
Purpose: to respond 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. The report considers any lessons learnt and responds to the recommendations to inform the Council's approach to future sports and leisure projects.
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11. **Members' Questions** 165 - 166
Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by Councillors in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.
-

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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Agenda Item 2.

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, 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, David Marsh, and Adrian Abbs

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), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic) and Rebecca Wilshire (Service Director Children’s Services)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Vicky Poole and Tony Vickers

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

Councillor Jeff Brooks announced the introduction of a Members Dashboard which detailed all highways and countryside fault reporting to allow Members to review all reported issues within their wards.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Public Questions

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that the wording of a number of questions received was not courteous, and noted that in future questions would be rejected if they were insulting or lacked courtesy.

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.

5. 2025/26 Q2 Financial Performance Report (EX4674)

Councillors Iain Cottingham, Heather Codling and Patrick Clark all made statements relating to the Council’s finances and increasing pressures from Children’s Services and Adult Social Care. The statements can be viewed in full [here.](#)

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Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which detailed the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Quarter Two 2025/26 outturn.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon requested clarification from Councillor Codling in relation to the Children's Services figures discussed. Councillor Codling repeated that the Children's Services budget for 2022/23 had been £11 million, which had increased to £19.8 million for 2025/26 but was forecast to be £23.4 million by Quarter Four.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that it was the biggest jump in an overspend outturn in one quarter that he could remember and described it as financial chaos. Councillor Mackinnon noted that the Council had just spent £700,000 on a grass football pitch at Faraday Road which was now about to be replaced; was planning to sell its commercial property portfolio and thereby lose £1 million in revenue; had increased the number of Executive Members to ten; and referred to an outdated Transformation spend figure which had recently been presented for review at a Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting; all of which he suggested displayed a lack of control over the finances.

Councillor Mackinnon queried what modelling changes the Executive would be adopting to prevent a recurrence of such a large overspend. Councillor Jeff Brooks responded that he did not accept the accusation of 'chaos' nor the comments relating to the Transformation programme. Councillor Brooks further provided assurances that the correct controls were in place going forward.

Councillor Cottingham reminded Councillor Mackinnon that in Quarter One of 2022/23 there had been an £8.1 million overspend under the previous administration. He commented that the Council was not in isolation and that local authorities across the country were struggling with the increased Adult Social Care pressures and the high unit cost of residential care for children. Councillor Cottingham noted that the budget had forecast one additional child but had needed to extend to four children in care.

Councillor Cottingham further referred to an £800,000 saving that the Council had hoped to make, which had not occurred due to the collapse of NRS.

Councillor Cottingham confirmed that there were numerous controls in place particularly in driving down the commissioning costs for care placements.

Councillor Mackinnon queried how Councillor Brooks could reject the comment in relation to Transformation when he had been present at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting and been unable to justify that the saving detailed within the report would be achieved. Councillor Brooks responded that Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee would review all business cases for transformation going forward. He further commented that the £469,000 detailed in the paperwork had returned as a pressure as the Executive had decided not to proceed with the project.

Councillor Mackinnon queried whether there had been a lack of political focus to the finances. Councillor Brooks rejected the suggestion.

Councillor David Marsh referred to the Adult Resource Centres and the inability to provide sufficient alternative private care and queried whether Councillor Clark still intended to sell off one or more of its care homes. Councillor Clark responded that part of the reason for not pursuing sale of the Adult Resource Centres was not due to finding alternative providers but had been due to being unable to provide a similar level of care. Councillor Brooks added that the Council was currently engaging to consider whether private providers could take over the care homes, and consequently there needed to be discretion when discussing.

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Councillor Marsh queried when the Council was likely to announce a deal in relation to Newbury Gateway and the Bond Riverside regeneration project. Councillor Brooks responded that again there was a market engagement exercise currently being undertaken and so was unable to provide any further update at this time but would provide updates when applicable.

Councillor Dominic Boeck suggested that the Children's Services budget was not spent wholly on statutory requirements and queried how services such as Early Help would be protected. Councillor Codling responded that that particular area would become statutory from April 2026 and so would continue to be funded with appropriate budgeting.

Councillor Brooks suggested that the question related more to the distinction between statutory and non-statutory services and how non-statutory services would be protected. He commented that an independent person would be appointed to provide challenge to commissioning care packages.

Councillor Nigel Foot further added that the Health and Wellbeing Board would be focusing specifically on early years intervention.

RESOLVED that: Executive note

- 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.
- The Q2 reprofiling of £22.5m of capital budget, approved by the S151 officer in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance.
- 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.

6. **Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025 (EX4745)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which provided an overview of Ofsted's findings following an Ofsted visit to West Berkshire's Children's Services to conduct a short ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) between 8 – 19 September 2025.

Councillor Codling thanked all staff involved in the inspection and noted that the commentary from the inspectors during the visit had been very positive.

Councillor Jeff Brooks echoed thanks to Rebecca Wilshire, Service Director Children's Social Care, and the team.

Councillor Dominic Boeck congratulated officers and Members for the 'Good' rating and noted that it was a continuation of the previous administration's achievements.

Councillor Boeck referred to the report and its assertion that there had been a 'deterioration in some services' in the period between the last two inspections and queried the evidence for this. Councillor Codling agreed to discuss the matter privately with Councillor Boeck but also suggested that the comment related to case numbers and a lack of specific oversight and a gap in management when the current administration had taken control of the Council.

Councillor Boeck suggested that the current administration was not presenting the situation accurately. Councillor Codling commented that the inspectors had referred to a number of case notes and spoken to a number of staff within the service and had based their findings on those reviews.

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Councillor Ross Mackinnon agreed that it was an inspection to be proud of but commented that the press release and official Council communications relating to the report findings had been unacceptable and amounted to a political attack on the previous administration.

Councillor Brooks commented that he would review communications in terms of statements made, however reiterated that he believed that risks had been previously taken in the management of the service.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that there had been staffing challenges and recruitment challenges but suggested that those were not reflective of a lack of political focus, they were reflective of challenges within the service.

RESOLVED that:

- To inform the Executive of the “Good” overall effectiveness rating and commend the progress made since 2023.
- 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.

7. Rights of Way Improvement Plan (EX4700)

Councillor Nigel Foot introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which requested adoption of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Councillor Richard Somner noted that it was a very comprehensive report and thanked officers for their work. Councillor Somner reminded the public of Linear Park within his own ward but noted the difficulty with the use of motorised vehicles in the area. Councillor Somner suggested that further work could be undertaken with signposting at Linear Park to clearly delineate which gates offered disabled access and which did not.

Councillor Somner highlighted a small number of typographical errors within the report and suggested further proofreading before final publication.

Councillor David Marsh commented that it was an excellent report and queried whether there was sufficient resource within the department to deliver the report’s aspirations. Councillor Foot responded that there were resources allocated to the Improvement Plan.

In response to a query as to whether the team would be able to ‘Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030’, Councillor Foot confirmed that officers would do their best to action this, but noted that the legal aspect to Public Rights of Way quite often slowed the process down, particularly when there were objections.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commended the report and queried how wards would be prioritised in relation to the rollout of the Plan. Councillor Foot referred to the work of volunteers throughout the district that contributed to the maintenance of public rights of way. He also referred to wellbeing walks which were hosted by volunteers and

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encouraged those with mobility issues to walk throughout the district. Councillor Foot further commented that work would be prioritised on the basis of those footpaths requiring work.

Councillor Boeck queried whether the introduction of five new routes a year would be co-produced with disabled and younger users. Councillor Foot confirmed that this would be the case and would be undertaken via the Local Access Forum.

Councillor Stuart Gourley seconded the recommendation within the report and noted how many kilometres of public rights of way there were in the district, which was only slightly less than the number of highways. Councillor Gourley also commended the work undertaken with landowners noting the recent successful access improvement works to Speen Moors.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- 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.
- 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.

8. **Local Planning Enforcement Plan 2025 (EX4735)**

Councillor Denise Gaines introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), which sought approval from Executive to carry out public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan.

Councillor Richard Somner expressed his support for consultation on the Plan and noted that it was a non-statutory element of service provided by the Council which received a lot of focus. He queried whether there would be sufficient resource to deliver what was laid out within the Plan. Councillor Gaines confirmed that there would be sufficient resource.

Councillor Patrick Clark seconded the recommendation within the report, noting the importance of consulting and the aim to make the planning process easier to understand.

RESOLVED that: Executive

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

9. **Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement (C4536)**

Councillor Tom McCann introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 10), which sought 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 for Wokingham Borough Council to become a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon noted that he remembered Wokingham Borough Council exiting a previous agreement and the ensuring financial implications, and queried what protection was in place to prevent a repetition. Councillor McCann commented that the agreement included an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice.

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Councillor David Marsh queried whether the agreement would cease if the Ridgeway Council proposal was approved. Councillor Jeff Brooks suggested that to the contrary it could provide the opportunity for further joint arrangements and additional work.

Councillor Justin Pemberton seconded the recommendations within the report, and celebrated the proposal and the successful work of the shared service.

RESOLVED that:

- West Berkshire Council enters into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31 March 2029.
- That the Executive delegates its public protection related functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee until the 31 March 2029.
- That the agreement includes an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice to give effect to leaving the agreement on the 31 March in any given year.
- West Berkshire Council continues to be the host authority.
- 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.
- 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 6 January 2017.
- 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.

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 8.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2025

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

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, David Marsh, and Tony Vickers

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), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Tom McCann, Vicky Poole, and Adrian Abbs

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2. **North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025 - 2030 (EX4733)**

Councillor Denise Gaines introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 3), which sought approval for adoption of the new North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 for the National Landscape legally referred to as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Councillor Tony Vickers, Vice Chairman of North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners Board, thanked the Leader for allowing him to speak and praised the work of the eleven-person North Wessex Downs National Landscape team. He also highlighted the strong volunteer resource that were vital to the work of the team.

Councillor Vickers suggested it was not a realistic option not to adopt the Management Plan, as there was a legal duty to seek to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs.

Councillor Vickers referred to the Protected Landscape Targets and to Target 7 which aimed to restore peat and heathland, and noted that whilst work would be undertaken the specific target had not been referenced within the Management Plan due to the very small size of relevant land within the North Wessex Downs.

Councillor Vickers noted that he had made a pledge that morning on behalf of West Berkshire Council to work collaboratively in the partnership with other decision makers on the Board.

Councillor Vickers noted that if the Management Plan was approved, the North Wessex Downs would become the first area in the United Kingdom to achieve IUCN green list status.

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Members collectively supported approval of the Management Plan and Councillor Heather Codling thanked Councillor Vickers for all the work undertaken in his role on the Council of Partners Board.

Councillor Nigel Foot seconded the recommendation within the report and reminded Members of the previous week's decision to approve the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, noting that it was now possible to quantify in monetary terms the benefit of green spaces. Councillor Foot commented that there was a £27.1 million per annum benefit to the residents and visitors of West Berkshire which equated to 8.5 million visits per annum. Councillor Foot noted how important this was, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing benefits.

Councillor Foot further praised and thanked the work of Councillor Vickers, all volunteers and the Public Rights of Way and Countryside officers.

Councillor Gaines expressed disappointment that Councillor Vickers did not feel that the Council already worked collaboratively with partners but thanked him for all his work on the Council of Partners and praised the Management Plan as an excellent document.

RESOLVED that: Executive approve the adoption of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan.

3. **Local Government Reorganisation - Full Proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (EX4717)**

Councillor Justin Pemberton introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 4), which proposed the approval of the Local Government Reorganisation Full Proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire for submission to Government. It was noted that the report had previously been reviewed and discussed by Council and Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Pemberton clarified that the report was proposed with the amendment set out at recommendation (f). It was noted that the recommendation had been included to take account of comments made by Green Party Members to include an ambition statement 'to deliver strong action on climate change and promote nature recovery'; and also to acknowledge that there were some amendments required to existing legal structures in relation to the Fire Authority in Oxfordshire.

Councillor Pemberton commented that the pack presented a formal proposal for a two unitary authority submission; to the south, a proposal for West Berkshire Council to merge with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils to form the new Ridgeway Council; and to the north a proposal to merge Oxford City Council with West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils to form an Oxford and Shires Council.

It was acknowledged that there were financial implications to the Proposal, the costs and benefits of which were set out within the report. Councillor Pemberton noted that two sets of savings related to the initial transition savings and transformation savings arising from potential transformation programmes.

It was noted that the final Proposal was a result of extensive engagement with residents, businesses and affected stakeholders.

Councillor Pemberton clarified that following Executive decision, the Government was expected to decide on the proposal in the summer of 2026, following which it was anticipated that elections would take place in May 2027.

Councillor David Marsh queried what would happen to West Berkshire Council Members in May 2027 if the Proposal was approved. He further suggested that ward sizes were likely to be much larger and queried how quickly the Boundary Commission would review

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this. He further queried whether Unison would be involved in the ongoing Ridgeway process.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that there was a need in transition for services to be provided until the new authority was able to take over and suggested that West Berkshire Council was likely to continue until 2028, whilst the shadow authority was setting up its staffing, budget and structure, for its first year in existence of 2028/29.

Councillor Brooks commented that ward sizes varied across the country and that a Boundary Commission review was likely to take place in the first electoral period of Ridgeway Council.

Councillor Pemberton noted that the Proposal had been completed within the timescales and criteria set by Government and had worked on the basis that across Ridgeway there would be 96 councillors, 38 of which would be based in West Berkshire. This had relied on a basic approach of reducing three Member wards to two, which would increase the number of residents within a ward but was not felt to be contrary to other areas in the country.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon offered his full support for the Proposal.

Councillor Brooks noted that he had met with Unison that day and provided assurances that they would be consulted in relation to any change and progress going forward with the Proposal.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations with the report and noted that it provided a real opportunity for residents and staff of West Berkshire.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- a) Is informed that since the statutory invitation to all councils in two tier areas, significant work has been undertaken by all Oxfordshire Councils and West Berkshire Council.
- b) Is informed that there has been significant engagement and collaboration on the development of these proposals by Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, West Berkshire Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council.
- c) Is informed that two other proposals will be submitted, one proposed by Oxfordshire County Council covering the Oxfordshire area (but excluding West Berkshire) and one from Oxford City Council covering the Oxfordshire and West Berkshire area.
- d) Approves the submission to Government of a full proposal as detailed at Appendix A, for a two unitary model based on one new unitary council covering the entire existing boundaries of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and West Berkshire Council, with the working title of 'Ridgeway', and a second new unitary covering the entire existing boundaries of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils and Oxford City Council, with a working title of 'Oxford & Shires'.
- e) Subject to recommendation d) being approved, notes that Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council will submit the full proposal directly to Government in line with the Oxfordshire invitation letter.
- f) Delegates to the Executive Director for Resources the authority, with the agreement of the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, to make changes to the proposal document in Appendix A prior to the submission to Government.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)

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CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

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Item 3 – Declarations of Interest

Verbal Item

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Item 4 – Public Questions

To follow

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Executive – 18 December 2025

Item 5 – Petitions

Verbal Item

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Devolution – Expression of Interest: Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority Expression of Interest

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 18 December 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Justin Pemberton |
| Report Author: | Clare Lawrence |
| Forward Plan Ref: | EX4747 |

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report seeks Executive approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government in response to the Government’s devolution policy following Full Council support at its meeting on 27th November 2025.
- 1.2 It is a stated Government policy intent that all regions in England benefit from devolution. The submission of the EOI Thames Valley will not bind the Council but will enable it to engage with Government on devolution of powers and functions to target regional economic growth working within a strategic partnership that aims to bring prosperity. This will enable collaborative regional governance to enable this Council to support innovation, business growth and investment. The aim of devolution is to ensure inclusive growth by opening greater prospects for skilled jobs, affordable housing and connected places that add to the region’s future economic sustainability.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 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
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|-------------------------|--|
| Financial: | <p>To date, each Berkshire Council has agreed a £10,000 contribution towards the devolution agenda. This has been met by the funds held by the Berkshire Prosperity Board.</p> <p>There are no direct financial implications arising from the submission of the Expression of Interest. If discussions with Government proceed the cost of establishing an MSA will be modelled and the opportunity will arise to explore how growth in the Thames Valley economy could create significant social and economic uplift for our area and the whole country. The Thames Valley is a positive contributor to Treasury.</p> <p>Devolution offers an opportunity to reset local government finances. In this context, the EOI submission seeks discussions with Government on developing innovative fiscal solutions to support investment into the Thames Valley Region. This reference to investment funding will also look to develop inward investment through the private sector and funding institutions, as part of any regional investment strategy.</p> |
| Human Resource: | <p>As the work devolves, there will be a requirement for additional resource supporting the development of a MSA and its strategic purpose. Therefore, a proposed resource plan will be submitted, subject to the EOI submission.</p> |
| Legal: | <p>The report seeks Executive approval to submit an EOI to open discussions with Government on devolution for our region. The Executive has the authority to discharge the function of the formulation of the council’s overall policy objectives and priorities, which permits it to make this decision.</p> |
| Risk Management: | <p>The submission of an EOI does not present any significant risks and it is non-binding. There is a risk that not submitting the EOI will result in a lost opportunity to establish an MSA and benefits resulting from this as set out in the report.</p> <p>A risk associated with an MSA will be that while the Leaders of Council’s will have a place on the MSA Board, the MSA and Mayor will have significant influence and have devolved powers. Some decisions of the MSA may not have the uniform</p> |

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| | support of all of the local authorities in the Thames Valley Region. | | | |
| Property: | The decision to submit an EOI does not have any direct property implications | | | |
| Policy: | The EOI submission does not bind the Council to any course of action and in itself it does not have policy implications. However, if with government support, the Council progresses an MSA, this will have significant policy implications especially in respect of supporting a prosperous and reliant West Berkshire | | | |
| | 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 | | No direct impact but through the English Devolution Bill, the Government will introduce a new bespoke duty for Strategic Authorities in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. Strategic Authorities will support partners in driving public service reform and the new devolution framework will set clearer expectations for Mayors' roles in local health systems and in improving population health |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | x | | No Direct Impact but an MSA supports proposals like Connect to Work and the Get Britain Working plan supporting people with protected characteristics being in work. |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Environmental Impact: | | x | | There are no immediate sustainability implications arising from these decisions. Government has indicated it will give strategic authorities a meaningful role in planning for our future energy system, establishing heat network zoning in England and leading on local nature recovery. The detail of these various policies is to follow. |
| Health Impact: | | x | | No immediate impact but the MSA will enable greater coordination of local government function with the NHS to support healthy lives |
| ICT Impact: | | x | | No direct impact. |
| Digital Services Impact: | | x | | No direct impact |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | x | | The EOI submission does not bind the Council to any course of action and in itself the EOI does not have policy implications. However, if with government support, the Council progresses an MSA, this will have significant policy implications especially to meet Priority Area 5: A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire |
| Core Business: | | x | | No Direct impact although any decision to progress an MSA will have implications on capacity of the organisation to address other priorities. |
| Data Impact: | | x | | A data sharing agreement will be in place |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Consultation and Engagement: | <p>Devolution is a collaborative process which will require continuous engagement and collaboration between local authorities and with residents, public sector institutions including the NHS, Police and Fire Authorities, businesses, and further and high education providers and other key local organisations and businesses.</p> <p>Devolution is primarily about giving power back from Central Government to local communities. It is therefore vital that residents are involved at the earliest opportunity to inform and shape the process. It has not been possible to carry out resident engagement prior to submitting an EOI but it is expected that resident engagement would begin after Government agrees to further discussions.</p> |
|-------------------------------------|--|

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The English Devolution White Paper 2024 set out the Government’s vision for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor. These authorities will drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, planning, skills, employment, and transport.
- 4.2 This report seeks Executive approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) through which there is a significant opportunity for regions in England to drive inclusive growth and prosperity for communities and businesses. With new powers and investment, MSAs can address strategic economic challenges and opportunities, in collaboration with local Leaders, business leaders and investors, with Government and increasingly, with other Strategic Authorities as part of the Council of regions.
- 4.3 There are substantial benefits from establishing an MSA for the Thames Valley including long-term devolved investment funds to support control over adult education and skills budgets. Also, devolved powers and responsibility over strategic transport, housing and spatial planning to better target, address housing affordability, promote green infrastructure and ensuring growth benefits reach all communities.
- 4.4 An MSA would provide an enhanced ability to attract private investment and innovation to support the development key sectors such as IT and life sciences to deliver a growth region with a stronger national and international capability of competing with major European economic clusters. It would offer stronger coordination and negotiating power with Central Government to secure devolved funding and national infrastructure investment.

- 4.5 For West Berkshire, MSA will have significant positive impacts on its businesses and residents. The Council responsibilities will remain unchanged but will be impacted by the MSAs strategies and policies. The Council will be able to influence the MSA in relation to economic growth, skills development, spatial planning, housing including affordable housing, transport, and the environment as the Leader will have a place on the MSA Board.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 In December 2024, the UK Government issued the English Devolution White Paper [Devolution White Paper](#) outlining a proposal for Strategic Authorities as a mechanism to rebuild and reform local government. Subsequently, the [Devolution Bill](#) enables power to be decentralised from Central Government to local authorities. This shift is intended to foster local growth, improve public services, and enhance democratic accountability.
- 5.2 Strategic Authorities must serve a population of at least 1.5 million and there are three tiers of Strategic Authorities proposed:
- (a) Foundation Strategic Authorities – Non-mayoral, with limited powers and funding access.
 - (b) Strategic Authorities – Mayoral-led (MSA) with significant powers and funding.
 - (c) Established Strategic Authorities – Proven mayoral authorities eligible for enhanced powers and funding.
- 5.3 This proposal is to support the submission of a EOI to Central Government for the establishment of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) to unlock devolved powers and resources that enable local leaders to shape policies to reflect local priorities and aspirations. While Buckinghamshire has opted out of discussions on a Mayoral Strategic Authority (it currently has a ‘combined authority’ arrangement covering Buckinghamshire only), Berkshire and Oxfordshire councils have been engaged in discussions about advancing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) proposal while retaining the option for Swindon to be included.

Devolution towards Evolution of Regional Economic Growth

- 5.4 The principle of devolution is well-established, with Government aiming to redistribute political, social and economic power across England. The Government’s ambition is now focused on universal coverage of Strategic Authorities across England following the English Devolution White Paper and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Leaders have been meeting across the Thames Valley Region to explore the opportunity for devolution.

- 5.5 The Government’s vision for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor to drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, planning, skills, employment, and transport.
- 5.6 This move to devolving power to regions signals a significant step change in how UK economic growth will be delivered. It places significant shift in how local government needs to develop and deliver its economic growth strategies. This will shift relations from Central Government to local regional strategic partnerships, working with an elected Mayor within a Strategic Authority. It will require council Leaders, supported by their Chief Executives, to form new strategic regional partnerships to drive our ambitions for place based all-inclusive growth.

Regional Economy

- 5.7 The Thames Valley economy is one of the most dynamic and globally connected in the United Kingdom contributing billions in Gross Value Added (GVA) to the national economy each year. On a per-person basis, it ranks second only to London, a reflection of the area’s powerful concentration of high-value industries and skilled workforce.
- 5.8 The Region’s prosperity has its roots in knowledge and innovation, driven by digital technology, communications, life sciences, biotech, defence and health including creative and professional service sectors that have flourished thanks to the regions connectivity and proximity to London and Heathrow Airport. Global companies have long chosen to locate in the region with recognised hubs for technology and business services. This includes fast growing sectors in pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and digital.
- 5.9 The region’s economy has a critical mass of science, learning, talent, intellect and inspiration. The region also has a culture of pushing boundaries, redefining leading edge, pioneering and entrepreneurship. The universities are powerhouses of knowledge and beacons of experimental excellence. The intellectual capacity of the region and talent emerging from the universities is driving the establishment of spin out businesses and the scale up of growing ones, contributing to an environment that promotes and nurtures commercialisation; a driving force for a new, science and knowledge led industrial revolution.

Regional Risk of Economic Decline

- 5.11 Despite a track record of success, the Thames Valley economy has not been immune to the decline in productivity across the UK in recent years, suffering from underinvestment and increased global competition. In addition, continued prosperity brings challenges, including housing affordability, infrastructure constraints, and uneven growth across localities.
- 5.12 There are considerable challenges for residents and businesses in generating a future proof transport infrastructure that supports the region’s economic growth which is showing signs of struggling to cope with increased demand. Education and skills need

to be developed on a regional collaborative basis to power capacity for economic growth.

- 5.13 The region could do much more to benefit from the advantages generated through strategic growth planning and collaboration at a much greater scale that can be currently delivered by individual councils. This places the Thames Valley under threat of seeing economic decline as businesses and inward investment risks diverting to regions that have clear joined up regional Growth Plans and unfragmented governance arrangements, selling the regions benefits to sectors and investors.

A Thames Valley MSA for Collective Regional Growth

- 5.14 Becoming a Mayoral Strategic Authority represents a significant opportunity for regions in England to drive inclusive growth. With new powers and investment, Mayoral Strategic Authorities can address strategic economic challenges and opportunities, in collaboration with local leaders, business leaders and investors, with Government and increasingly, with other Strategic Authorities as part of the Council of regions. This is a new platform in the regional and local government landscape, creating systems based on collaboration and collective action that can work at scale to make connections, drive innovation and support growth.
- 5.15 There are substantial benefits for the Thames Valley, in creating a Thames Valley Regional MSA approach. Long-term devolved investment funds will support devolved control over adult education and skills budgets which would allow the authorities to better to align training provision with the needs of local industries, from digital technology and life sciences to creative industries helping retain talent and businesses whilst helping to ensure inclusive access to opportunities.
- 5.16 Devolved powers and responsibility over strategic transport, housing and spatial planning will support planning at a wider regional level enabling authorities to better target investment in deprived or underperforming areas, address housing affordability, promote green infrastructure and ensuring growth benefits reach all communities. A regional transport strategy could strengthen east–west links, while improving access to Heathrow and London. Coordinated investment in rail, bus, and sustainable transport would reduce travel times, improve productivity and support the net zero agenda.
- 5.17 An enhanced ability to attract private investment and innovation partnerships would support the development of the innovation ecosystem and key sectors such as IT and life sciences in order to stem the current exodus of UK innovation overseas and also help to attract more overseas investment to the region. Science parks and universities with the regions globally connected business base could form a knowledge-intensive growth region with a stronger national and international capable of competing with major European economic clusters.
- 5.18 There is the potential to scale up rapidly and deliver significant regional and national economic growth. Establishing an MSA will act as catalyst for growth to target funding

and skills programmes where they are needed most, helping to reverse productivity decline and remove barriers to economic development.

- 5.19 Stronger coordination between the MSA local authorities and Central Government will stimulate a larger, integrated economy that can carry more weight in negotiations with Whitehall, securing devolved funding and national infrastructure investment. It would also present a more compelling ‘investment ready’ proposition to global investors seeking a region that combines cutting-edge research with commercial capability.
- 5.20 Consolidating these strategic functions currently spread across multiple councils will reduce duplication, improve decision-making, and create a single, accountable leadership structure that gives confidence to investors and our public sector partners.

What this means for West Berkshire Council

- 5.21 For West Berkshire, the establishment of the Thames Valley MSA with the benefits set out above, will have significant positive impact on its businesses and residents. The Council responsibilities will remain unchanged but will be influenced by the strategies and policies of the MSA. The Council will be able to influence the MSA as the Leader will have a place on the MSA Board (voting rights TBC). All regions (to be defined by Government) will be expected to produce a Spatial Development Strategy which will provide the blueprint for development and infrastructure growth (led by MSAs where in place). West Berkshire will be able to influence this through its place on the MSA Board
- 5.22 As part of the MSA Board, the Council will also be able to influence the following:
- Policies and decisions around **Housing development** including Affordable Housing
 - Strategies to deliver **Growth** supported by funding for infrastructure delivery
 - **The duty to improve health and to reduce health inequalities.** Greater coordination between partner agencies – especially important for Adult and Children's services, community safety, to secure joined up approaches and secure funding.
 - **Thames Valley Economic Development and regeneration strategies** – Innovation, sector development and new business growth – marketing, lobbying powers and access to funding
 - **Skills Development** – Funding for Joined up skills development programmes to meet business need. This is more coordinated and effective delivered at level greater than West Berkshire Council can do individually.
 - **Transport and Local Infrastructure** – Investment in Transport and Roads through funding secured by the MSA
 - **Environment and Climate Change** – Energy and Nature Recovery

The Expression of Interest Thames Valley Vision

5.23 The EOI (Appendix 1) builds on discussions between local authorities in the Thames Valley to date. It emphasises the region's strengths in innovation and productivity and its readiness to enter discussions with Government for a possible Mayoral Strategic Authority. Devolution will drive inclusive growth and unlock significant opportunities for local communities and the UK more broadly.

5.24 The Thames Valley EOI highlights:

- **Economic rationale:** The region has several key business sectors highlighted in the Modern Industrial Strategy. The Strategic Authority would provide the framework that allows businesses to leverage those sectors across a wider geography and create jobs. Our intent is to restore growth to pre-Covid levels of prosperity.
- **Collaborative governance:** There is a commitment to partnership working across constituent councils, with clear terms of reference and for the EOI to mark the start of wider stakeholder engagement across the region.
- **Strategic powers and funding:** Powers over transport, skills, housing, and economic development and the ability to provide these within a business ecosystem will lead to greater investment.
- **Place-based leadership:** Greater local control to deliver national policy objectives at local level has been shown to be successful in other established Strategic Authority areas. Adapting powers and functions to meet local needs strengthens local identity, accountability, and the ability to deliver tailored solutions for residents.

5.258 The EOI is the first stage towards devolution. Whilst it does not bind any Council to a Mayoral Strategic Authority at this stage, it does indicate our readiness to engage further. If the Council is to proceed further, Council and the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee will be engaged at future key decision points to ensure we are providing the right devolution framework for our region.

5.26 Oversight of the proposals will be through an informal Devolution Programme Board made up of The Leaders from each Council interested in pursuing devolution and supported by their Chief Executives.

Process and Engagement

5.27 The EOI was developed collaboratively, with input from local authority Leaders and Chief Executives and is supported by a robust economic narrative and evidence base.

5.28 The EOI is a strategic step to initiate formal discussions with Government, with further public and stakeholder engagement planned before any final decision.

Next Steps

- Submission of the EOI to Government by 19 December 2025, followed by further engagement and refinement based on feedback from Leaders, Chief Executives, and stakeholders.
- Ongoing governance and oversight via the Devolution Programme Board, with regular updates to Councils and public consultation as the process evolves.
- Build the proposal through regular engagement, agreeing the geography and the size and scale of the Strategic Authority based upon criteria set out in the Devolution White Paper
- Stakeholder engagement with residents, businesses and public sector partners to explore devolution for our region.
- Finalise proposal with further decisions made at key points by Executive and Scrutiny / Council

6 Other options considered

6.1 The White Paper is clear that the Government intends that all of England to be devolved by default and is committed to ending the deals-based approach. The Government will also legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable it to directly create Strategic Authorities in any places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Therefore the “do nothing” option could mean Government legislating on our behalf for devolution. This is not a recommended option.

7 Conclusion

7.1 The EOI is not binding on the Council, however it does present the opportunity to open further discussions with Government on devolution to drive significant economic and social benefits. The region stands to gain enhanced powers, financial resources, greater strategic control and improved infrastructure, as well as the ability to deliver more responsive public services.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Proposed EOI

Appendix 2: Current list of MSAs

Appendix 3: Examples of powers and funds devolved to MSAs

Background Papers:

[Devolution White Paper](#)

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: Clare Lawrence
Job Title: Executive Director - Place
E-mail: Clare.lawrence1@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Thames Valley Devolution EOI Letter

VERSION AND DATE

VERSION 6 11TH NOVEMBER 2025

DESCRIPTION

Sixth draft with minor amends following Devolution Board

This EOI aims to...

- Proactively position Thames Valley at the front of the queue for future devolution by submitting a compelling case ahead of formal process, as an input for new ministerial briefings
- Set out a clear and focused pitch, explicitly aligned to current Government priorities, making it easy for ministers and officials to see how their goals can be achieved through Thames Valley's proposals
- Demonstrate the existing strength of partnership and delivery across the region, and readiness for devolution
- Demonstrate proactive thinking around how Level 3 MSA powers will be used to drive benefits in this region and its specific conditions and opportunities

This EOI is not...

- A longform prospectus
- For a broad range of audiences – we are in this instance aiming to convince Government and the Thames Valley Members of the case for devolution
- An exhaustive application form with all questions answered – emerging ideas and thinking is helpful

When submitted to each local authority Council for approval, this letter will be accompanied by a cover report setting out the context and rationale for the EOI, and addressing regional and individual local authority issues or concerns. This aims to support constructive Council discussions and approval.

The EOI letter will also be accompanied by supplementary document for use by local authority Leaders and CEOs in discussions with Government and other national and regional stakeholders. It will set out more information on the economic context, growth challenges, and opportunities facing the Thames Valley; the rationale for devolution and a Mayoral Strategic Authority; the proposed objectives and mechanisms for regional growth; and anticipated next steps in engagement with government and stakeholders. We are in the process of collating a list of projects and ideas to include in this document and the EOI itself.

Draft EOI

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the Leaders of the local authorities in the Thames Valley, are writing to you in your capacity as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding our desire for devolution and our inclusion on a future Devolution Programme.

We have carefully considered our rationale and case for devolution to this region and see a significant opportunity to drive growth and prosperity as a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Our £97 billion economy is already a core contributor to the national economy and will continue to add economic value through our highly productive and innovative businesses, constituting the sectors prioritised in the Modern Industrial Strategy and a large part of the Ox-Cam Corridor, a key national growth proposition. However, the region's post-pandemic recovery has been slower than the national trajectory, and our globally recognised clusters face increasingly strong competition. We will use the powers, investment and platform as an MSA to unlock constraints on growth, with the potential for the Thames Valley economy to be up to £18.7 billion a year larger by 2040, which corresponds to a £7 billion annual uplift in tax revenue contributions to the exchequer.

We have come together as strong local Leaders to pursue the significant opportunities of devolution for our communities. Whilst we acknowledge and respect our differing political and local priorities, together we recognise and collectively support the core economic rationale and strategic intention for delivering inclusive growth within a Thames Valley MSA. We stand ready with the strength of relationships, trust, track record, collective governance and ways of working required to work with Government and implement a successful MSA. We would like to work towards a first mayoral election in May 2027, in line with the current timeline for local government reorganisation.

Importance of the Thames Valley for the UK Economy

The Thames Valley serves as an innovation-driven and export-focused catalyst for UK economic growth, accounting for approximately 5% of England's total economy while comprising just 3.4% of its population. Our economy comprises world-renowned universities, respected research centres, and leading science parks filled with forward-thinking companies, driving innovation ecosystems that spur new ideas and growth across UK supply chains. Oxford University is a jewel in the UK's global research offer, and our partnerships with Reading University creates value for residents, businesses, and investors through key assets such as the Thames Valley Science Park, which hosts research facilities and archives for the Natural History Museum, British Museum and Kew Gardens. Our region is a globally compelling investment case, with major global companies such as Microsoft, Oracle, Redwood Technologies, Virgin, Vodafone, and Hewlett-Packard located in the UK's Silicon Valley along the M4 corridor, with direct links to London and Heathrow Airport. From the region that gave the world the Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, the Ellison Institute of Technology in Oxford is now investing over £10 billion in research and development to facilitate further globally significant advancements in artificial intelligence, robotics, and life

sciences. Major investment in AI infrastructure has been secured across the region, with the second largest concentration of data centres in the world in Slough and the first AI Growth Zone in Culham. We have high-performance manufacturing capabilities along the M40 corridor, exemplified by Plant Oxford, home to BMW Mini, extending into Banbury and the UK Motorsports Valley into the Midlands. We are home to world-famous tourist attractions, from Windsor to the Cotswolds, Oxford, Blenheim Palace and Bicester Village. We are known world-over as a great place to visit, live, innovate and invest. Our investment proposition is already backed by Government, with continued global promotion of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, of which we are a core part, investment in East-West Rail, high-profile support through the Oxford Growth Commission and recent investment in the Cowley branch line.

The industrial composition of the Thames Valley directly aligns with almost all the sector strengths outlined in the Industrial Strategy – our economy is anchored by professional and business services, with notable capabilities in digital technologies, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and a prominent finance sector. The strength of the region's visitor economy not only supports our foundational sectors but also positively impacts our creative industries, especially our growing film and television cluster around Shinfield Studios. Proposed visitor economy investments, including the Puy du Fou Bicester, together with significant heritage landmarks would remain substantial contributors to export growth. Importantly, the Thames Valley demonstrates a strong orientation towards export activities: approximately 48% of the workforce is employed in exporting industries, and 40% hold positions within tradable sectors, both figures exceeding national averages. Exceptional productivity and economic complexity facilitate the dissemination of innovation across key sectors and strengthen supply chains nationwide. Furthermore, growth in GVA and household income in the Thames Valley has surpassed national rates, thereby improving local living standards and contributing positively to Exchequer revenues.

Signs of risk and stagnation

Despite the Thames Valley's underlying strength, the region has not re-established its pre-pandemic growth path. Post-Covid productivity indicators show mixed fortunes, even as the UK aggregate edged up through 2023, evidence that recovery here has been shallower than the national trend. If the region were to return to the pre-pandemic growth trajectory from 2027 onwards the Thames Valley economy would be up to £18.7bn a year larger by 2040. This matters for residents: a weaker trajectory means fewer high-value job opportunities and slower wage progression than would otherwise have been the case. Slower growth in the Thames Valley reverberates through national supply chains and weakens spillovers to other regions, putting at risk delivery of the Industrial Strategy's IS-8 ambitions on productivity, exports and business investment. It limits the pace at which discoveries are commercialised, dampens the pipeline of high-value FDI into the UK, and slows diffusion of technologies across the wider economy. Crucially, restoring the Thames Valley's growth trajectory would result in an estimated £7 billion increase in tax revenue contributions from residents and

businesses, directly strengthening the Government's ability to fund essential services and invest in long-term national priorities.¹

Scale and agglomeration to drive growth

To address these risks and realise our full economic potential, we need to leverage our potential for scale and agglomeration across our economic geographies. While each authorities' economy is individually strong, travel-to-work analysis reveals largely self-contained labour markets with currently limited cross-boundary matching and knowledge transfer across the region. In this current fragmentation lies a clear opportunity: given the region's complementary sector strengths the absence of integrated governance and coordinated connectivity means the Thames Valley is under-leveraging innovation adoption and diffusion and the opportunity to create a more unified labour market to scale economic growth.

Establishing an MSA with a growth mission at its core

We propose the establishment of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) as a decisive step towards realising inclusive growth across our region. By harnessing devolved powers, the MSA will transform thriving yet separate labour markets into a unified innovation economy, ensuring that prosperity is accessible to all communities. Through the implementation of a Local Growth Plan, we can extend and enhance the efforts of the Oxford Growth Commission to systematically address housing quantity, quality, and affordability across the Thames Valley, one of the key constraints on inclusive growth and a key driver of deprivation. MSA powers would enable accelerated delivery of affordable and social homes, around employment hubs. Integrated multi-modal, low carbon transport solutions could be expanded and expedited along the M4/M40 corridors, into Heathrow and across the Ox-Cam corridor, and critical investment in digital, water and energy infrastructure facilitated, strengthening connections between urban and rural residents and key economic growth nodes, and beyond. This infrastructure delivery would align with targeted skills and employment initiatives, developed with spatial awareness of our IS-8 strengths and a commitment to tackling deprivation and untapped potential within our communities. Enhanced collaboration and coordination enabled by the MSA would also position the region to more effectively address environmental priorities, including climate change and biodiversity.

Collectively, these measures would result in improved job opportunities, reduced commute times, and provide greater access to affordable housing for residents, supported by an aligned skills programme and transport system that matches talent to opportunity. For the UK, it means the Thames Valley driving national growth through faster innovation, stronger exports, and a bigger boost to the public purse.

We recognise the highly interconnected nature of the Thames Valley, with London, across the Ox-Cam Corridor and into the Midlands. A Thames Valley MSA will be a strategic

¹ This estimate is based off the ratio of GDP to national taxation (UK taxation as 37% of GDP) established by [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) research

platform from which to go further and faster on pan-regional collaboration with our neighbours, including working on joint projects, spatial development and investment to drive wider economic growth. We are determined to use our Thames Valley partnership to further capitalise on economic scale and complementarity and compete across the globe.

If granted MSA status, the Thames Valley would be a fundamentally different kind of strategic authority – the largest by GVA outside of London, the MSA will be focused on unlocking constraints on an already high-performing economy so that all areas of the Thames Valley, and indeed beyond, benefit. We are therefore actively exploring innovative approaches to securing private investment and financing. Work is already underway to develop robust and viable propositions that match the scale and ambition for a Thames Valley MSA, and we look forward to working with Government to shape this more sustainable growth financing model.

Next steps

A Thames Valley MSA would unlock constrained, high-value growth, accelerate innovation diffusion across IS-8 sectors, and strengthen national fiscal headroom. We therefore ask that the Thames Valley be considered for inclusion in the next Devolution Programme, and we would welcome an early meeting to discuss this opportunity. We are ready to work in open dialogue with MHCLG and your officials to implement a new phase of devolution and make the best impact for our businesses, communities, and the country.

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Appendix 2 – Current Combined Authorities

Mayoral Combined Authorities

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- East Midlands
- Greater Lincolnshire
- Greater Manchester
- Hull and East Yorkshire
- Liverpool City Region
- North East
- South Yorkshire
- Tees Valley
- West of England
- West Midlands
- West Yorkshire
- York and North Yorkshire

Combined County Authorities

- Devon and Torbay
- East Midlands
- Greater Lincolnshire

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Appendix 3- Examples of powers and funds devolved to MSAs

| Fund/Program | Total Amount Allocated | Period |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Devolved Transport Budget | £1.07 billion | 2021-2022 |
| Transforming Cities Fund | £1.2 billion (Round 2) | 2021-2022 |
| Levelling Up Fund (LUF) | £4.8 billion | 2021-2024 |
| Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) | £2.6 billion | 2022-2025 |
| Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) | £4.5 billion | 2019-2022 |
| Adult Education Budget (AEB) | £1.5 billion | 2020-2021 |
| Specific Regional Projects | Varies | 2017-2022 |

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Finance Improvement Plan

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 18 December 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Iain Cottingham |
| Report Author: | Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive) and Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director Finance, Property & Procurement and s151 Officer) |
| Forward Plan Ref: | EX4746 |

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council is pro-actively responding the financial position that it, and many other Councils across the country, faces. This report sets out the Finance Improvement Plan, the external assurance review of a Finance Improvement Group to provide even greater focus on the Council's finances. The Council has already been managing an increasingly difficult financial position. Rises in inflationary costs, the wider state of some of the market for social care provision, growing demand for services and the complexity of service demand has led to significant increases in cost. The Council has instigated a range of measures to reduce costs over several years, with the introduction since 2023 of a Financial Review Panel which has led, as an example, to a forecast more than halving of agency costs. These measures have not been sufficient to reduce costs fast enough considering rapidly escalating care placement, capital financing and contractual costs.
- 1.2 The Finance Improvement Plan has been developed to provide an overarching approach, with supporting themes, to address the Council's financial position and reliance upon Exceptional Financial Support. As the Council has been in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), the Council has commissioned an external financial resilience review, and this is included in this report.
- 1.3 The Finance Improvement Plan incorporates a response to the finance resilience review (undertaken by CIPFA – the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) as well as the creation of a new Finance Improvement Group which will include external support to enable greater oversight and challenge of the Council's financial approach.

2 Recommendations

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

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary | | | |
|--|--|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| Financial: | The creation of the Finance improvement Group will require remuneration of external representatives. This is estimated to be approximately £26k per annum and updated figures will be included within the budget papers for 2026-27. | | | |
| Human Resource: | None identified in the report directly. | | | |
| Legal: | None identified in the report directly. | | | |
| Risk Management: | None identified in the report directly. | | | |
| Property: | None identified – any individual properties for disposal will come through the relevant Council governance route. | | | |
| Policy: | The recommendations in this report will support the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. | | | |
| | 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 | | None identified through the report. |

Finance Improvement Plan

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | X | | None identified through the report. |
| Environmental Impact: | | x | | None identified. |
| Health Impact: | | X | | None identified. |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | None identified. |
| Digital Services Impact: | | x | | None identified. |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | | | This will support the Council to deliver against the Council Strategy priority: Services we are Proud of . |
| Core Business: | | X | | None identified |
| Data Impact: | | X | | None identified |
| Consultation and Engagement: | The Leader, Deputy Leader and finance portfolio holder | | | |

4 Executive Summary

4.1 The Council has faced a range of financial challenges in recent years. It has instigated a financial review panel in 2023 as well as a number of programmes that have been successful in helping to reduce costs, not least halving the amount of agency spend that the Council incurred between 2023 and 2025. Despite progress that has been made, the Council's finances continue to come under increasing pressure, with the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy forecasting an ongoing need to seek Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from central government.

4.2 The Council fully recognises this position and wishes to reduce reliance on EFS in the future to become a financially resilient Council. To enable this to happen, the Council will build on existing work in progress, the recommendations provided through the recent external CIPFA financial resilience review and take action through a Finance Improvement Plan and accompanying Finance Improvement Group.

Finance Improvement Plan

4.3 The Council benchmarks on costs favourably in many areas, with strong levels of service delivery; for example, the Council is currently rated as 'Good' for Children's Social Care by Ofsted, 'Good' for Adult Social Care by the Care Quality Commission, with high levels of recycling rates as well as strong educational performance. The Council's finance team are well regarded, with the Council being one of a small minority who met the deadlines for preparing its financial statements in shorter timescales in recent years. Corporately, the Council has engaged with devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and has responded to the latest Local Government Association Peer review. The Council is keen to see its services regularly reviewed, with peer or external challenges taking place in the past 18 months in:

- Adult Social Care
- Highways
- ICT and digital
- Children's Social Care
- SEND thematic review
- Public Health
- Health & Wellbeing Board

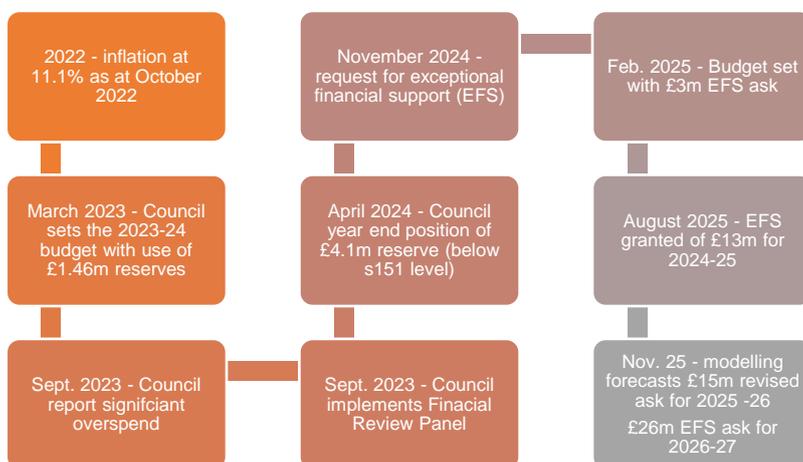
4.4 The Council is absolutely committed to improve its financial position and the accompanying Improvement Plan and documents set out the key milestones and governance required to achieve this.

5 Supporting Information

5.1 The Finance Improvement Plan (FIP) is included in appendix A. The Council has proactively developed this in parallel with the emerging CIPFA resilience review. The Council commissioned CIPFA, following the Council's request for exceptional financial support, to undertake a review of the Council's financial resilience. This external review has highlighted a variety of themes and key actions that the Council will focus its efforts to deliver against. The CIPFA report can be found at appendix C.

5.2 A summary of key financial events is included below to give an overview of the challenge faced by the Council and the actions it has taken to date:

Graph 1.1: Summary of key financial points 2022-present

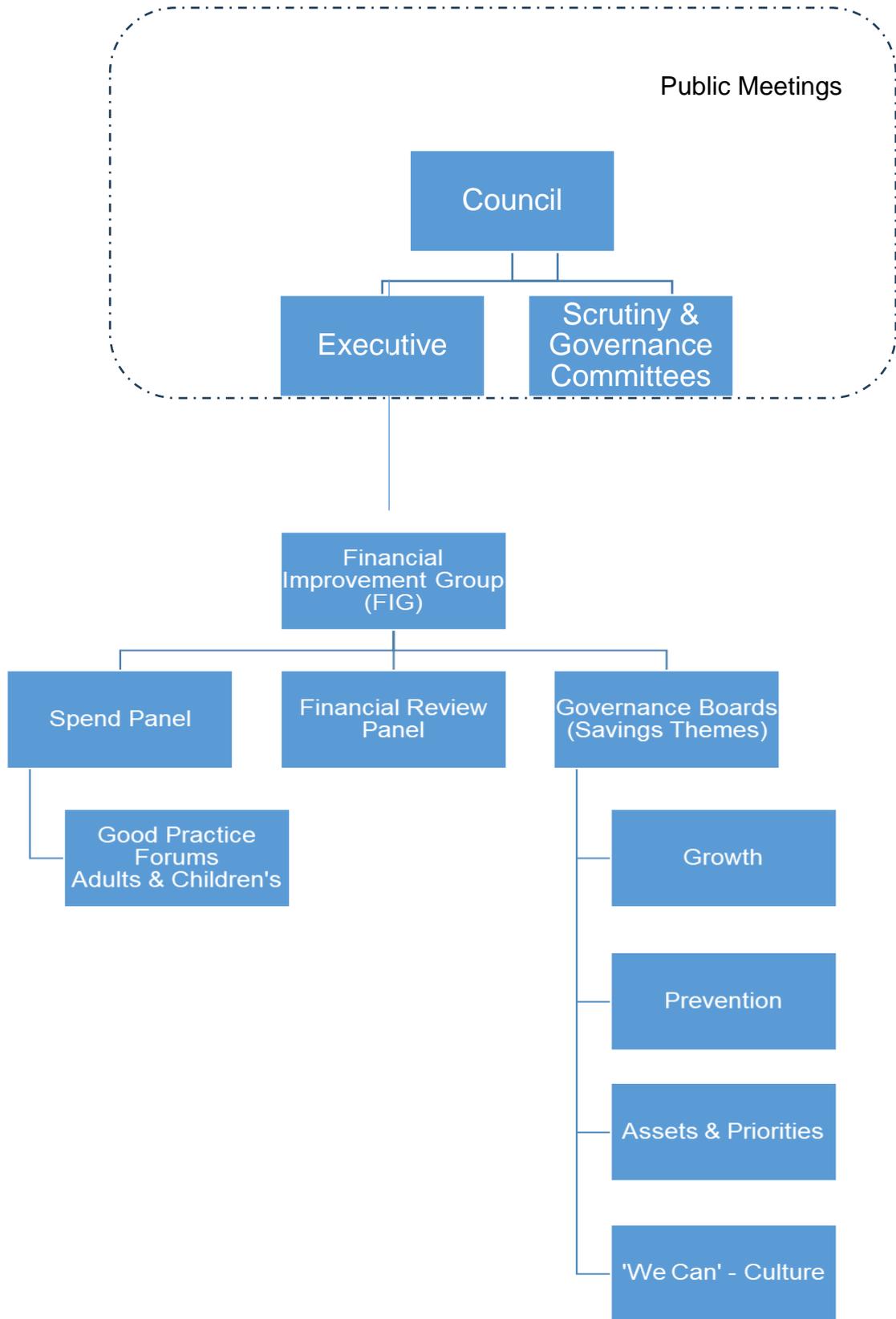


Finance Improvement Plan

- 5.3 The response to the financial challenge, and the FIP is a corporate endeavour. The Council will only achieve this through working collaboratively, and the Council has many examples of this, as well as working with partners, to achieve positive outcomes for residents, which includes being a financially resilient Council.
- 5.4 The Council could continue as it is. There is no formal requirement for an Improvement Plan or group to be created. The Council has been very transparent with its financial position over several years highlighting the challenges it faces. Moving forward greater focus on longer term financial resilience, and planning is required, alongside external constructive challenge to assist the Council in becoming more financially resilient.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Finance Improvement Plan will be an area of crucial focus for the Council. Its progress will be rigorously monitored by the Financial Improvement Group (FIG), to ensure sufficient progress is being made to tackle the Council's financial position and provide assurance to members, the public and wider stakeholders and that the reliance upon exceptional financial support is minimised in future years.



7 Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix A – Finance Improvement Plan
- 7.2 Appendix B - Draft Finance Improvement Group Terms of Reference
- 7.3 Appendix C – CIPFA Financial Resilience Review – Autumn 2025

Background Papers:

Local Government Association benchmarking report – LG Inform

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: Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive) and Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director – Finance, Property & Procurement) and s151 Officer
Job Title: see above
Tel No: 01635 519619
E-mail: joseph.holmes1@westberks.gov.uk ;
shannon.colemanslaughter@westberks.gov.uk

Appendix A – Finance Improvement Plan (FIP)

Aim:

For West Berkshire Council to become a financially resilient Council reducing reliance on Exceptional Financial Support ¹by the end of the current MTFS period (2026 -2030).

Introduction

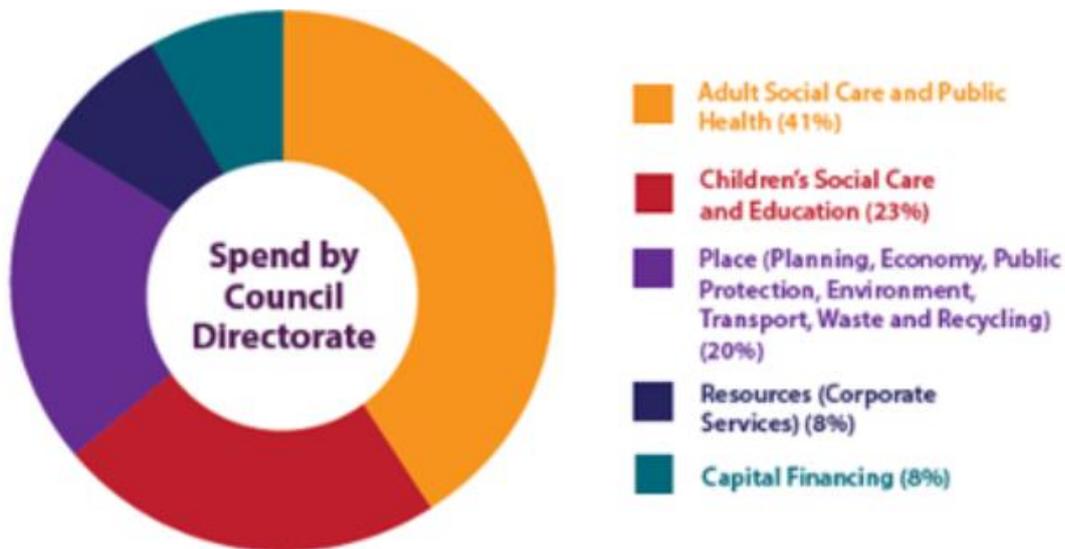
1. The Council was unable to set a balanced budget for 2025-26 and required the support of £3m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from Central Government. This was on top of £13m of EFS, that has been granted, for the 2024-25 financial year to provide the Council with sufficient reserves, in line with the section 151 Officer's (the Council's Chief Financial Officer) recommendation of a minimum level of general fund reserves.
2. As part of the EFS request to Central Government (MHCLG, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), the Council commissioned an external review of its financial resilience. This external review was conducted by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) in the early Autumn 2025. The review is based on CIPFA's own assessment, including speaking to members and officers of the Council. This review has also been shared with MHCLG.
3. In advance of any further requests for EFS, the Council is making proactive efforts to improve its financial position over the medium term by implementing a Financial Improvement Plan (FIP), based on the Council's own knowledge, also taking on board the CIPFA review's findings, and learnings from other Councils who are in receipt of, or are close to being in receipt of, EFS.

Background

4. The Council's financial position has been one of low financial resilience for a number of years. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council, successfully, managed to function with a comparatively low level of general fund reserve. The pandemic, and the ensuing rising inflation rates and macro-economic instability, meant that the Council faced rapidly increasing unit costs for its services, especially for adult social care and children social care placements, Home to School Transport and waste management services. With constraints on Council Tax levels (the main source of the Council's income) below prevailing inflation, and the inflation rate of many of the Council's key contracts, the Council's expenditure has started to significantly outstrip its income sources.
5. The structure of the Council's budget is very similar to the majority of unitary Council's (those that provide all Council services including social care, planning, highways, revenues & benefits, waste management, education support etc). Key areas of spend and therefore financial pressure are social care commissioning budgets. The Council is experiencing significant unit cost pressures because of the markets which the Council commissions from are under significant pressure and there is limited competition driving up costs. For context 25 of the highest social care placements account for almost 7% of the Council's entire net budget

¹ Or any subsequent form of Government financial support

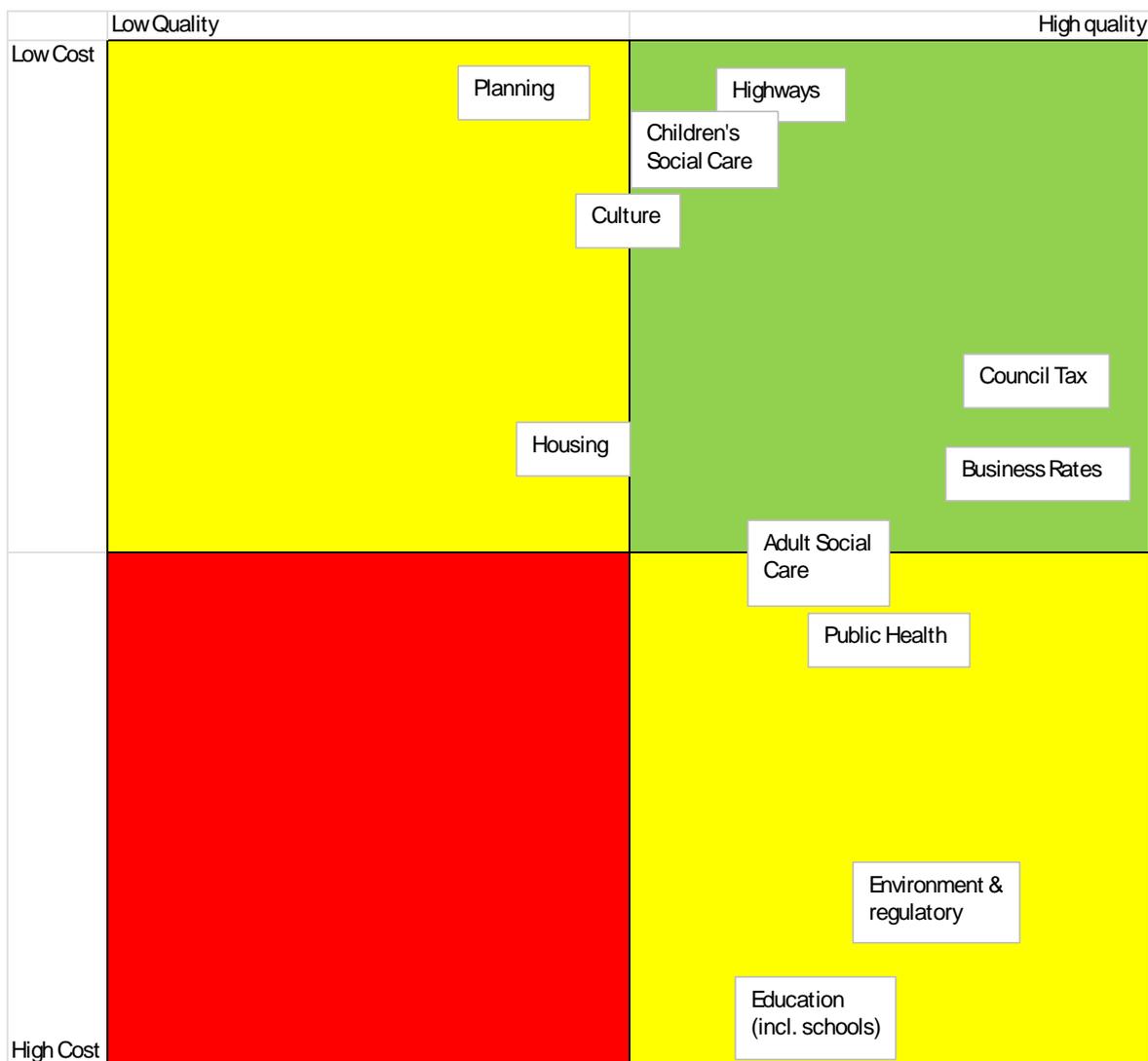
Summary of the 2025-26 Budget by key expenditure areas



7.4 The Council has a Best Value duty upon it. This is articulated as “The Best Value Duty is concerned with making arrangements to secure continuous improvement”. The Council needs to be continually aware of this and consider its comparative spend position. The summary below is taken from the publicly available Local Government Association (LGA) website LG Inform. This is a summary of the comparative position of the Council versus all other English unitary authorities from October 2025 using a variety of measures². This remains a key area of focus to ensure that the Council continues to deliver value for money services.

² For some Council areas there are multiple spend and performance information points – the above is a summary of these – Environment & Regulatory contains the waste management contract which makes up the largest amount of spend in this area

Finance Improvement Plan



Draft Medium Term Financial position 2026/27 -2029/30

6. Provisional Fair Funding Reform 2.0 estimates have placed significant financial constraints on the Council's base funding levels (final settlement is anticipated in late December 2025). Fair Funding reform, alongside increasing social care costs (in particular, unit costs), are driving an estimated EFS requirement to support the revenue budget over the duration of the MTFS. Current estimations forecast that it is unlikely the Council will be able to remove the EFS requirement over the MTFS term. EFS itself, due to high-cost borrowing levels impacting on Minimum Revenue Provision costs, is also driving a gap in the MTFS. The Council therefore remains committed in minimising the level of EFS sought from central government. The MTFS and associated budget papers are scheduled for presentation to Council in February 2026.
7. The summary of the implications of the fair funding review are included in the table below. These are subject to the Government releasing its Local Government finance settlement (expected the week commencing the 15th December). The below table highlights a reduced income of £88.1m compared to previous forecasts. This is driven by an assumed worsened outcome of the Government's fair funding review for Local Government, and with a 'hard' reset of the business rates system. This reset alone contributes an almost £10m immediate reduction in funding.

Finance Improvement Plan

8. The summary of the implications of the fair funding review are included in the table below. These are subject to the Government releasing its Local Government finance settlement (expected the week commencing the 15th December). The below table highlights a reduced income of £88.1m compared to previous forecasts. This is driven by an assumed worsened outcome of the Government's fair funding review for Local Government, and with a 'hard' reset of the business rates system. This reset alone contributes an almost £10m immediate reduction in funding.

| Assumption period | 2026-27 | 2027-28 | 2028-29 | 2029-30 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|
| MTFS base funding / £m – February 2025 | 195.2 | 205.7 | 216.7 | 224.7 ³ |
| MTFS base funding / £m – November 2025 | 184.2 | 184.6 | 187.8 | 197.6 |
| Variance / £m | 11 | 21.1 | 28.9 | 27.1 |

Actions Implemented

9. In response to the financial position the Council has implemented the following:
- (a) Financial Review Panel has been reconstituted and refocused to act as a star chamber. The Group chaired by the Executive Director for Resources is charged with reviewing each service budget and actuals to identify pressures, savings, mitigating actions and budget appropriateness and resilience.
 - (b) A Spend Panel process has been initiated, focused on reviewing and challenging all non-essential expenditure. The panel is chaired by the s151 with the Chief Executive and Executive Directors in attendance. Additional external scrutiny has been sourced to attend the panel and provide organisational challenge.
 - (c) External scrutiny in the form of subject matter experts is being commissioned to attend the Council's Good Practice Forums (Adults & Children), to review all packages agreed and reviewed.

Further Proposals

10. In response to the financial position the following proposals are made:
- (a) A Finance Improvement Group (FIG) is established. The FIG will be chaired by the Chief Executive, and will include Executive Directors, the s151 officer, Leader of the Council, and Portfolio Holder for Finance. External scrutiny will be provided through an external Chief Executive and s151 providing additional support and challenge rigor. The FIG will meet every 6 weeks and the inclusion of external as

³ Assumed increase in line with 2025-29 forecasts as the MTFS ended in 2029

Finance Improvement Plan

well as internal members of the group will provide greater scrutiny and constructive challenge to deliver the FIP. This has been considered to ensure that there is a balance between ownership of the delivery of the FIP within the Council, and consideration of external advice and expertise. The FIG is intended to commence in early January 2026. The draft terms of reference are included in appendix C.

- (b) Development and implementation of a Finance Improvement Plan (FIP), to be monitored by the FIG. The core fundamentals of the FIP are proposed to be based around a set of key themes. These have been selected to address the structural financial deficit that the Council has by providing a focussed approach; it is important not to have a concise focus in order to achieve traction in respect of action, whilst balancing sufficient cross-cutting work, so that the Council develops strategic savings plans and does not retrench into year by year 'salami-slicing' of budgets.

11. FIP, the key themes: Growth, prevention, assets prioritisation and we can. Each theme will have a range of actions to deliver financial improvement, and these will be consolidated into the overall delivery plan. Each theme will have an Executive Director as project sponsor with a member sponsor as well providing political oversight.

Governance

12. The FIP will also report through to the Executive and Scrutiny Committees over the life of the FIP to ensure that there is sufficient public knowledge and member oversight of the progress against the FIP.

13. The FIP will be informed by updates from the themes sponsors on progress towards the key elements of the delivery plan below, as well as identifying new opportunities over the life of the MTFs for reducing the Council's cost base and use of EFS. A summary of the various groups meeting to support the Finance Improvement Group in ensuring delivery and oversight of the FIP is included below:

Financial Governance Forums Supporting Financial Improvement Plan (FIP)

Draft Delivery Plan

| No. | Theme | Action | Owner | Completion date |
|-----|------------|---|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Corporate | An external sector-led finance peer review in 2026 to review progress of the FIP within first year of working | Executive Director (Resources) | Q3 2026-27 |
| 2 | Corporate | The creation of a Finance Improvement Group, including external challenge | Chief Executive | Q4 2025-26 |
| 3 | Corporate | Re-establishment of monthly budget monitoring | Service Director (FPP) | Q1 2026-27 |
| 4 | Corporate | Demonstrable impact of Spend Panels | Service Director (FPP) | Q4 2025-26 |
| 5 | Corporate | Demonstrate a response to the actions in the CIPFA Resilience review to be completed | Executive Director (Resources) | Q3 2026-27 |
| 6 | Growth | External fees and charges review to identify opportunities for new / increased income | Executive Director (Resources) | Q1 2026-27 |
| 7 | Prevention | Deliver options for alternative education setting for SEND placements that are more local and reduce costs | Executive Director (Children's) | Q3 2026-27 |
| 8 | Prevention | Focus on opportunities, with partners, to evidence a reduced demand for services over the medium term | Executive Director (Children's) | Q4 2026-27 |

Finance Improvement Plan

| | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---|---|------------|
| 9 | Assets & prioritisation | Develop and implement an asset optimisation and disposal plan over the period of the MTFS | Executive Director (Resources) | Q1 2026-27 |
| 10 | Assets & prioritisation | Reduce the unit cost of social care placements through a new commissioning approach | Executive Directors (Adults and Children's) | Q3 2026-27 |
| 11 | Assets & prioritisation | Refocus the Corporate Programme to generate the highest level of financial and service impact | Executive Director (Resources) | Q1 2026-27 |
| 12 | We can | Refresh the Council Strategy to reflect the future financial position | Service Director (Strategy & Governance) | Q1 2026-27 |
| 13 | Assets & prioritisation | Develop a right sized Council funded capital programme to fit with MTFS fiscal rules | Service Director (FPP) | Q4 2025-26 |
| 14 | Prevention | Development of prevention strategy in key spend areas | Executive Directors (Adults and Children's) | Q1 2026-27 |

Appendix B - Draft Finance Improvement Group Terms of Reference

Purpose:

- 1) To act as the advisory board to the Council on the FIP
- 2) To oversee progress and delivery of the FIP delivery plan
- 3) To provide challenge, advice and independent expertise to WBC to support sufficient pace and good governance in its financial improvement plan
- 4) To provide assurance to stakeholders that the Council recognises its financial position, the requirement to have a strategic plan to enable a more financially resilient council, and the Council continues to provide its Best Value duty alongside its other statutory duties.
- 5) To provide a clear governance framework and delivery measures that ensure that the Council is held to account for its FIP, whilst ensuring sufficient time to embed clear savings proposals and reporting structures to allow a clear path to financial resilience.
- 6) To report regularly on progress on key achievements and areas for improvement to ensure that the overall aim is achieved

Delivery:

It is envisaged that the FIG will be in place for a two-year period from its inception. It is anticipated that the FIG will provide constructive challenge on scale, scope and delivery of the actions within this FIP. The FIG may wish to explore issues that arise through more in-depth detailed reviews of specific areas to gain greater understanding and assurance.

Governance:

The Council will establish a Finance Improvement Group (FIG). The FIG will consist of the following attendees:

- two independent consultants (experience of Chief Executive and a section 151 Officer)
- West Berkshire Council Leader and finance portfolio holder
- West Berkshire Council's Executive Leadership Team and s151 Officer
- Local Government Association Principal Advisor
- Secretariat support provided by democratic services

Other officers from across the Council's services will be required to attend as and when required.

Meetings of the FIG will be held in private and will be confidential to ensure that there is sufficient openness and robustness in challenge to explore a range of options.

Costs and internal support requirements

1. Any costs associated with the FIG will be met by WBC. Independent Board members will be paid a fee for their work.
2. Board members will need to work flexibly as the demand of the role requires. However, WBC has set a capped budget for the Board based on an average 1 day per board member each month.
3. FIG meetings to be held every 8 weeks to allow for sufficient time for progress to be made between meetings and the relevant actions completed with an aspiration to move to quarterly in the future
4. The FIG will be supported by the Council's programme office and democratic services teams to ensure that the overall programme plan is proactively tracked, kept up to date and that issues and risks are managed on a day-to-day basis through officers.

West Berkshire Financial Resilience

11 November 2025

West Berkshire council provides over 700 services for residents and businesses and it is committed to “*Making West Berkshire greener, fairer and more prosperous, with thriving communities and services we are proud of [sic]*”.

Past below-inflation council tax increases and higher than average net spending per capita meant that the council has historically had low reserves for unexpected events. With increased demand and inflationary pressures for its statutory services for adult and children social care, special educational needs, and increased interest rates on borrowing, those reserves have been eroded, despite delivering significant financial savings.

As a consequence, West Berkshire council is in a perilous financial position and has no clear plan for resolving the issue. Exceptional financial support has provided a short-term fix for 2024-25 and 2025-26 but the structural gap between net revenue spend and the funding available remains. The absence of a strategy risks undermining its application for further exceptional financial support. And without this, the council is very unlikely to have sufficient resources to set a balanced budget for 2026-27, necessitating a s114 notice.

The Council commissioned CIPFA to review its financial resilience and to make recommendations on next steps. We interviewed a range of Members and Officers, liaised with the council’s external auditors and the LGA peer review team, and examined a range of documents provided and on the council’s website.

We acknowledge the considerable efforts of the current s151 Officer, her predecessor and Members to remedy the situation. This has included the establishment of a Finance Review Panel, a strong track record in delivering savings, and a focus on the need for greater efficiency. Nevertheless, as part of any further application for exceptional financial support likely to be required for 2026-27, it will be important to have a clear strategy for how this situation can be resolved. Our recommendations are based on building such a strategy.

The steps needed for such a strategy are set out in this report. Our detailed findings are attached as an annex.

1. Promote the importance of the need to address the structural gap in the Council's finances

Why this is important:

- The council has a long-standing structural gap in its finances: expenditure has historically exceeded the funding available and as a result reserves have been eroded.
- In the absence of a credible savings plan, the forecast gap continues to grow and in 2026-27 is likely to reach £14m and will exceed the reserves available.
- There is a perception within the council that the successful application for EFS in January 2025 obviates the need to address this structural gap.
- But the council is at risk that MHCLG might not countenance further EFS without assurances that there is a clear, deliverable recovery plan.
- This could lead to the need for a s114 notice and a possible government intervention.

What needs to be done:

1.1 As part of a refresh of the Council Strategy, the need to strengthen financial resilience should feature as a priority, accompanied by suitable actions and performance measures.

1.2 Establish a financial improvement panel of Members and external representatives with the task of regularly reviewing progress with the associated recovery plan.

1.3 The importance of focusing on addressing the structural gap needs to be embedded in all council communications and deliberations:

- All budget papers, finance reports and other communications need to clearly state the importance of resolving the structural gap.
- All submissions to the Executive or the Council for a decision should include an assessment of the impact on the revenue account over the medium term.

2. Develop a clear recovery plan for how the structural gap will be resolved

Why this is important:

- Existing savings plans are largely short term and do not address the underlying structural issues.
- Whilst there is a recognition of the need for efficiency savings, there is insufficient consideration of cash-savings by stopping activities or by introducing more fees and charges.
- Transformation activities are siloed and lack sufficient co-ordination or oversight. There is sizable slippage of the current programme and insufficient activities to identify future opportunities.
- The capital programme is too large, lacks focus and is not affordable.

What needs to be done:

2.1 The council should prepare an outline recovery plan that:

- Estimates the potential gap each year over the medium term, drawing on the budget exercise for 2026-27. This should draw on the revised role of the FRP in examining an activity-based review of key services.
- Using the planned 'star-chamber' approach, examine the pressures on each directorate and sets savings targets over the medium term accordingly.
- Specifies an overall affordable limit on the capital programme, how projects will be prioritised, and scales back the capital financing requirement accordingly. Priorities should focus on projects that generate a strong revenue benefit, as well as projects required to meet statutory obligations.
- Includes an asset disposal plan that identifies the building and land that are no longer required, how the maximum return can be achieved, and how/when they might be sold/developed.
- Tasks directorates with identifying short-term savings for 2026-27 through cost reduction and income generation.
- Explores the costs and benefits of inviting external organisations to identify longer-term transformational change.

3. Establish mechanisms to implement the recovery plan

Why this is important:

- Roles and responsibilities between Members and officers are blurred. This contributes to a lack of focus and undermines accountability. Members are getting too involved in operational issues; officers are reluctant to challenge the financial merits of key decisions:
 - One key example is the development of the Grazeley solar farm. The cash flow modelling is overly optimistic and the risks of a short-term adverse impact on the revenue account have not been adequately scrutinised.
 - Similarly, the council was unable to provide the evidence to demonstrate that the disposal of commercial investments adequately weighed up the costs and benefits to the revenue account. The figures we saw on anticipated rates of return were inaccurate.
 - We also understand that Members have been involved in the spending control panel meetings. In our view, the scrutiny and approval of individual spending transactions should be officers only.
- There is insufficient oversight of existing transformational change or other savings initiatives. Quarterly reporting of progress is not sufficiently frequent, there is already considerable slippage on some key projects, and a lack of a forward pipeline.
- Existing systems, processes and structures undermine the capacity of the finance team to provide timely updates and scrutiny of the council's financial position. A re-sizing project began in July 2025 to upskill and build capacity within the finance team, and an Agresso enhancement project is being implemented to reconfigure the system to allow for correct close down of reporting periods. Until these initiatives are fully implemented, Members and senior officers will find it difficult to monitor progress effectively or take timely corrective action.

What needs to be done:

- 3.1 The council should clarify roles and responsibilities for Members and officers through an update of its financial regulations, scheme of delegation and associated training.
- 3.2 Finance should, as a matter of priority, examine the revenue implications of the capital programme and planned asset disposals to identify projects that risk an adverse impact on revenue finances over the medium term and make recommendations to the SLT and Executive on any that should be halted.
- 3.3 The recovery plan should set out the resources required for delivery, the SRO and associated milestones, targets and anticipated outcomes.
- 3.4 The recovery plan should be regularly reviewed by the newly established finance improvement panel.
- 3.4 The council should prepare a business case that explores the feasibility of introducing monthly financial monitoring.

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Building Control Assurance and Update Report

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 18 December 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Tom McCann |
| Report Author: | Sean Murphy |
| Forward Plan Ref: | EX4739 |

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report aims to update the Executive on the provision of the shared Building Control Service and recent developments in the sector.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Executive is **INFORMED** of the matters set out in this report.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|-------------------|---|
| Financial: | <p>The Council currently contributes £124K per annum to the shared service for delivery of the non-fee earning aspects of the Building Control Service. This was an increase of £45K in 2025/26 to reflect the renewed focus on compliance leaving a split of 70% / 30% between fee earning and non-fee earning work, the latter being non-fee earning.</p> <p>At the start of the 2025/26 the Shared Building Control Service was approximately £100K in deficit in a budget that must be balanced over a three-year cycle. This was primarily caused by the need to use agency staff in 2024/25 following staff losses and the fact that the split between fee earning and non-fee earning work was no longer valid. It is anticipated at the end of the current financial year this will be reduced significantly following the rebalancing of the service budget.</p> <p>There also continues to be continued pressures because of competition and the need to engage agency staff. The fees this year were set anticipating the significant use of agency staff and in year costs should be managed within budget.</p> |

Building Control Assurance and Update Report

| | | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | In October 2026 it is anticipated that the Building Safety Levy will commence. A Section 31 grant has been indicated to both partner authorities for set up and this is in the order of £130K each. Going forward there will be a top slice of the levy for collecting and in West Berkshire terms we anticipate this to be in the order of £60k to £90K per annum. | | | |
| Human Resource: | All staff are currently employed by Wokingham Borough Council, but West Berkshire Council has a responsibility to ensure that staff remain competent to deliver the service on its behalf. | | | |
| Legal: | The legal framework is set out in the report. The arrangements for service delivery are set out in the Inter-Authority agreement effective 1 st April 2024. | | | |
| Risk Management: | The risks are set out comprehensively in the report as are the proposed mitigations. | | | |
| Property: | None | | | |
| Policy: | None | | | |
| | 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 | | |

Building Control Assurance and Update Report

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| 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 | | | Building regulations set out a raft of provisions aimed at energy efficiency and protecting the environment. |
| Health Impact: | X | | | Poor housing affects health, unsafe housing risks injury or death. It is incumbent on those charged with compliance and enforcement including the Councils building control and public protection functions to perform their duties effectively and competently. |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | | | None |
| Core Business: | | | | Contributes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer, healthier homes. • Protective services |
| Data Impact: | | X | | |
| Consultation and Engagement: | Corporate Board have been consulted. | | | |

3 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Grenfell Tower tragedy was the worst peacetime tragedy of the modern era. The loss of over seventy lives and the personal impact on so many people is still felt strongly today. Although the tragedy occurred in 2017 the resulting Inquiry only concluded in the autumn of 2024 such was the level of detail it considered.
- 3.2 The tragedy also had significant impacts for those responsible for the regulation of construction and housing. The subsequent Inquiry and review led to legislative changes and proposals for the future delivery of the regulatory framework. The purpose of this report is to set out the various implications for the Council and set out proposals arising from the Inquiry with respect to Building Control functions.
- 3.3 The report sets out a range of challenges facing the service at local level including issues around recruitment and retention and the effects of competition on the delivery of the service and the consequential implications on the budget. The report also explores the national landscape and in particular progression of the Grenfell Inquiry recommendations on the future of Building Control and the implications of recent collapses of private sector suppliers.
- 3.4 Officers are of the view that these functions need to be positioned within the Council as protective services with the focus around compliance, enforcement and public protection whilst seeking to compete to reduce the financial impact on the Council.

4 Supporting Information

Background

- 4.1 In the early hours of the 14th June 2017 fire broke out in the Grenfell Tower block of flats in North Kensington. The fire, which was subsequently discovered to have been started by an electrical fault in a refrigerator in a fourth-floor flat, spread rapidly engulfing the block leading to the deaths of 72 people. A further 70 were injured and 223 escaped.
- 4.2 It was established very early on that the cladding / insulation on the exterior of the building had contributed significantly to the spread of fire and in turn to the significant loss of life. In 2016 an independent report had identified a large number of serious issues with fire safety in the building including the fitting of fire doors and smoke venting systems.
- 4.3 The building had been renovated in the period 2014-2016 and the Building Control functions were delivered by Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea – Building Control Service. The Officer who was allocated oversight visited the site some 16 times over this period.

The Review and the Grenfell Inquiry

- 4.4 Following the tragedy several reviews took place. The first, the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety was undertaken by Dame Judith Hackitt. The interim report published in December 2017 described the entire regulatory regime as being ‘unfit for purpose’ although did not propose an outright ban on cladding. In 2018 the government announced a ban on flammable cladding on all buildings over 18

metres in height as well schools, care homes, and student accommodation. Meanwhile local councils were instructed to identify all high-rise buildings (defined as over 18 metres) and along with the fire service assess compliance. By June 2020, around 2,000 high-risk buildings had been identified over 18m tall in England alone; a further 9,600 high-rise buildings thought to have combustibile cladding; and 100,000 between 11 and 18 metres. In West Berkshire, the buildings identified as being over 18 metres were those at The Racecourse development and Parkway.

- 4.5 In 2017 the government also announced a Public Inquiry to be led by Sir Martin Moore-Bick. This was to run alongside a criminal investigation being undertaken by the Metropolitan Police. Phase 1 reported in October 2019 and concluded that the construction and type of cladding / insulation was the primary reason for the fire spread. Phase 2 commenced in January 2020 and concluded in September 2024.

5 Implications for Local Authorities

The Building Safety Regulator

- 5.1 The Building Safety Act 2022 established the Building Safety Regulator (BSR). The Regulator was assigned three key responsibilities namely:
- regulate higher-risk buildings,
 - raise safety standards of all buildings, and
 - help professionals in design, construction, and building control, to improve their competence.
- 5.2 The BSR set out a competence framework for all Building Control Surveyors that had to be met by April 2024. This meant training and a full end point assessment. There are various levels of competence requirements, and all surveyors and approval bodies must be registered with the BSR. In June 2023 the Regulator also set out a code of conduct for the Building Control Approval Bodies as well as a code of conduct for Building Control Inspectors. Non-compliance with the codes can lead to registration being withdrawn. Non-compliance with the terms of registration can lead to criminal convictions for both the approval body and the registered inspector. There are also misconduct rules and implications that can lead to investigation and ultimately loss of registration.
- 5.3 Local authorities are not required to register as an 'approval' body however it is subject to the regulatory regime set out in Part 2 of the amended Building Act 2004 which includes inspections by the BSR to check on effectiveness of performing their BC functions. They are also subject to the provisions relating to the service of improvement notices and where there are continuing failings or in the view of the BSR people are being put at risk the functions can be transferred legally to another local authority or to the Secretary of State. Bracknell were, for example, inspected in December 2024 so it is likely West Berkshire will be inspected at some point.
- 5.4 The Building Act 2004 was also amended to allow for the issuing of statutory Operational Standards Rules (OSR's). These were issued in September 2024. It is a criminal offence for a local authority not to comply with a contravention notice issued by the BSR with respect to non-compliance with the OSR's. In addition, there are offences for obstructing and /or deceiving a BSR officer or for giving false or

Building Control Assurance and Update Report

misleading information to the BSR. Registered Building Inspectors (including those employed by local authorities) also commit criminal offences if they do any of the following:

- give advice or act outside the scope of their registration.
- deliberately do anything that implies work is within scope of their registration when it is not.
- act as or imply that they are an RBI, without being registered.
- obstruct, deceive, or impersonate an authorised BSR officer.
- give false or misleading information to BSR.
- fail to provide information as requested by an authorised BSR officer.

It is worth noting that not only can a local authority face criminal charges, but it can also be charged for the cost of any investigation and prosecution.

5.5 Paragraph 1.10 of the Operational Standard Rules makes it clear that authorities within shared service arrangements need to have in place compliance arrangements. The guidance suggests that this includes:

- i) random spot checks.
- ii) peer review.
- iii) internal audit.
- iv) external audit.
- v) management review.

5.6 It is also suggested that the Council review complaints, performance, requests by the regulatory authority and any prevailing guidance. Ultimately, the authority needs sufficient competence and understanding of the service to provide proper oversight of compliance with the OSR. The OSR can be found here: [Operational standards rules - GOV.UK](#) . It is not specifically stated but it is reasonable to interpret that a local authority can face legal action as per 5.4 above regardless of whether delivery is delegated under a shared service arrangement.

5.7 Finally, on the 30th October 2024 the government announced that local authorities will be responsible for recovering the Building Safety Levy on behalf of the Secretary of State. New burdens funding is indicated to assist with setting up collection mechanisms. Ongoing costs will be recovered by keeping a proportion of the levy receipts. Local authorities are required to register as collection authorities.

The Inquiry Findings – Building Control

5.8 Phase 2 of the Grenfell Inquiry looked in detail at the impact of regulatory failure and the role it played in the tragedy. This included looking at the role that materials approval bodies, LABC, London Fire Brigade and RBKC Building Control Service played.

- 5.9 With respect to the RBKC building control service the Inquiry identified a catalogue of failings from missing records, failure to ask for critical information through to fundamental flaws in ensuring the competence of individual inspectors to conduct specialist work. It also identified an over-willingness of the Council to see itself as a partner to the industry stating at 62.14 that this *'reflect(ed) a fundamental misunderstanding among many of those who work in the construction industry, contractors, building control bodies and others, that the function of building control is to provide a service to applicants rather than to enforce the regulations robustly for the benefit of the community at large'*.
- 5.10 Whilst the Inquiry report identified that the primary failings fell to the individual inspector it noted that, *'his ability to carry out his task effectively was hampered by an excessive workload and poor management of the department as a whole.'* For example, the Building Control Manager was unaware that that this was the first residential cladding application that the inspector had worked on. Ultimately and for a whole chain of failings the Council issued a competition certificate on an unsafe and non-compliant building noting, *'Grenfell Tower did not comply with the Building Regulations and was dangerous, building control was the last line of defence and had a statutory obligation to check for compliance with the Building Regulations'*.
- 5.11 A full summary of the findings with respect to Building Control can be found in Chapter 62 here [Phase 2 report](#)

The Inquiry Recommendations – Building Control

- 5.12 Local authority building control services have had to compete for many years with the private sector. Until recently called 'approved inspectors' but now identified as 'Registered Building Approvers.' This has led to competition being a major focus for building control services and the drive for commercialisation and difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff as LAs are constrained by LA terms and conditions. The Inquiry was critical of this competitive arrangement identifying building control as an important protective service. At 113.35 of the report, it was stated that, *'the evidence shows that in the period leading up to the Grenfell Tower fire many of those involved in major construction projects, including clients, contractors and even architects, regarded building control primarily as a source of advice and assistance. It was even described as an extension of the design team. In many cases that was how building control itself saw its role. That was a serious misunderstanding, but it was fostered by building control bodies themselves, who preferred to co-operate with applicants to enable proposals to be approved rather than enforce the Building Regulations rigorously. In our view, that has to change.'*
- 5.13 The Inquiry stated that as a result, *'competition for work between approved inspectors and local authority building control departments introduced a similar conflict of interest affecting them. As things stand that underlying conflict of interest will continue to exist and will continue to threaten the integrity of the system. We therefore recommend that the government appoint an independent panel to consider whether it is in the public interest for building control functions to be performed by those who have a commercial interest in the process.'*
- 5.14 Finally the Inquiry looked at the broader delivery of building control services and concluded that, *'the shortcomings we have identified in local authority building control*

suggest that in the interests of professionalism and consistency of service all building control functions, including those currently performed by local authorities, should be exercised nationally. Accordingly, we recommend that the same panel consider whether all building control functions should be performed by a national authority.'

West Berkshire Council Functions

- 5.15 In April 2024 West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough Councils entered into a new five-year shared service arrangement. This arrangement recognised the complexity of the regulatory regime, the impact of competition, the renewed focus on public protection, challenges around recruitment and retention and financial challenges posed by increased levels of compliance.
- 5.16 The shared service management have confirmed that all staff involved in the delivery are registered and competent and the service itself is notified to the BSR and registered for the purpose of the Building Safety Levy. Support staff have also been subject to additional qualification training.
- 5.17 The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) is built upon a delegation of the delivery of the Building Control functions to Wokingham as host authority. This includes issuing or refusing competition certificates and conducting other statutory functions including those relating to demolitions and dangerous structures. Other aspects of the Building Act 1984 are enforced by Environmental Health. Prosecutions for West Berkshire matters require WBDC consent. Trading Standards can investigate Building Act offences as part of the wider remit into crime associated with building work.
- 5.18 There is a clear governance arrangement included in the IAA that sets out a framework of performance and operational management with a combination of monthly reports and quarterly Joint Service Board meetings to which the service reports. In addition, the service underwent a Peer Review in 2023 undertaken by LABC (Local Authority Building Control) which concluded a high level of compliance. A recent inspection of the ISO 9000 quality management system also concluded the same.
- 5.19 In terms of existing buildings in the private rented sector the responsibility for compliance falls to Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service for the common areas and the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) Private Sector Housing team for individual units. We have in place a signed MOU and there are regular partner meetings and joint visits and inspections. Of particular focus are prior approval and other conversions where a programme of joint visits is identifying safety concerns.

6 Update on the Building Control Shared Service

- 6.1 The new shared service arrangement has now been in effect for some eighteen months. In that time the governance arrangements have proved effective with Joint Management Board meetings taking place as scheduled. The Board have received all the data and information required by the inter-authority agreement governance schedules and the relevant Wokingham lead has attended every meeting to update.
- 6.2 With respect of the operational delivery of the service there are a number of key issues, as follows:

Building Control Assurance and Update Report

1. Recruitment of qualified surveyors remains difficult (if not impossible) despite introductions of significant re-gradings and market supplements. The main reason for this is competition from the private sector who offer lots of incentives such as company cars etc. which are attractive to newer surveyors. All the surveyors that have been trained by the service (including those funded by government) have left on qualifying with some transferring to the private sector.
2. An internal audit was conducted that looked at compliance with the OSR. This reported general compliance. As with all audits there were follow up actions and JMB is monitoring progress.
3. The database used by BCS is currently in its final year of contract. Options are being explored which are taking account of the implications of any local government reorganisation. There are more advanced products on the market now for this area of service however the current situation may mean that a direct award through government framework may be the best route in the short term. The Board are being appraised on such matters.
4. In terms of finance the Service entered the year with a £100K deficit – primarily caused by the use of agency staff to cover vacancies. The re-evaluation of the fee earning / non-fee earning parts of the service means combined with an increase in applications it is likely to be significantly reduced by the end of year and eliminated in 2026/27 if trends continue.
5. Despite the staffing challenges performance remains strong. The 2024/25 performance outturn was as follows:
 - 100% of reported dangerous structures visited within 24 hours
 - 99% of applications registered within three days
 - 77% of applications checked within ten days
 - 97% of certificates issued within five days
 - 100% of inspections carried out same day
6. The Service has recently been independently re-accredited against ISO 9001 for its quality management systems. The outcome was positive with the report from the British Standards Institute stating, *‘The conclusion of this review is that the management systems are achieving their intended outcomes and are contributing towards the strategic direction of the organisation. A positive recommendation for continued certification has been made’*.
7. All staff have maintained legal and professional competence for their tasks they are assigned as required by the post Grenfell competency framework that was introduced.

6.3 In terms the national landscape the following updates are of significance:

1. The Building Safety Levy (which will be collected by local authorities) will come into being in October 2026. There is more information on the levy here: [Building Safety Levy: Guidance - Guidance - GOV.UK](#) . The government have notified that a Section 31 grant allocation of approximately £130K for each partner will be made for implementation. This will include procurement of the relevant software packages and project staffing costs and systems / procedure updates. Ongoing funding of collection will be funded through a top-slice of the levy. A proportion of the implementation grant will need to be passported to Wokingham to progress this and a proportion will be needed internally to set up a charging regime. Longer term there will be a top-slice to pay for collection and administration, but the exact figure has not yet been finalised. Currently the proposal is that BCS monitors all collection requirements (as they hold the records of all relevant applications) and West Berkshire will collect for its administrative area. Local collection (dependent on development) could be in the region of £3/£4M per annum passported to government to pay for the Regulator and oversight post Grenfell.
2. The government have appointed the Panel to conduct the review set out in 5.14 above and this is due to report soon. There are no indications at this stage as to whether the ending of competition or a national regulator will be the outcome. The evidence presented to the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee by Local Authority Building Control can be found here: [committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/16388/pdf/](#)
3. There have been a number of collapses of Registered Building Control Approvers. The highest profile was the recent collapse of Assent Building Compliance who went into receivership without advanced warning on 6th November 2025. The parent company group consists of three separate Registered Building Control Approvers (RBCA's).
4. Current 'live projects for the three companies across both West Berkshire and Wokingham amounts to approximately 210. These are projects where the RBCA has not given notice to date that either the works have been completed on site, or the work has not commenced on site within a three-year period. These projects will be at different stages of construction either not commenced on site or partly constructed. The local authority service must try to establish the works undertaken and assessed by the RBCA to date, assess submitted information and continue to deal with the ongoing work to its completion. This resource is over and above its general workload from existing customers.
5. All clients relating to the 91 cancellation notices have received a written explanation from BCS outlining the options available to them.
6. It is highly likely that the RBCA has not informed the Service of completion of works in relation to the remaining projects when they were completed or not progressed. There may be legacy projects which will require letters to be sent to Assent clients explaining the situation. Email addresses were not supplied by the RBCA in these instances. Individual responses will require the service's IT system to be updated following contact.

7. Many Assent clients are contacting the Service daily with their enquiries both by telephone and email. A separate page has also been written and added to the BCS website to help explain and direct Assent customer enquiries to their own responsibilities.
8. The above work will require ongoing allocation of time and resources within both the business support and surveying teams over the coming months.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Building Control is one of those local authority services that has traditionally not attracted political attention or focus. Often seen as an offshoot of planning functions or as paid consultancy rather than an important front line regulatory / protective service. Nevertheless, as events have shown that when things go wrong, they can have the most serious implications not only for individuals but also for the local authority and its officers.
- 7.2 Every building project presents some degree of risk including safety risk if a non-compliant building is signed off as compliant. This could be a simple loft conversion or a prior approval conversion of a significant structure, new build, or commercial building. It is incumbent on the Council to ensure it performs its functions within the OSR framework.
- 7.3 The future of the service within the local authority setting is uncertain. The outcome and recommendations of the review will be published in due course and then the government will need to consider its position with respect to the recommendations. It is likely that any change may be at least two years away with an implementation period being required.
- 7.4 As highlighted above the service faces significant challenges around financial viability primarily linked to the recruitment and retention issues exacerbated by competition. There is also little prospect of this improving without change in the delivery model nationally. The failings of a number of private sector inspection services over the years has also added pressure to a stretched service with additional unfunded workload for local authorities who remain the regulator of last resort and the last line of defence against unsafe and non-compliant buildings and structures,
- 7.5 In summary, the shared service has helped the Council to maintain delivery and keep costs down through the provision of resilience and shared overheads but delivery takes place in the context of significant uncertainty. Despite all the uncertainty performance remains exceptionally strong thanks to the commitment of the management and the team.

Subject to Call-In:

Building Control Assurance and Update Report

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 Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months.
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

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Youth Council for West Berkshire

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 18 December 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Heather Codling |
| Report Author: | Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer) |
| Forward Plan Ref: | EX4750 |

1 Purpose of the Report

This report sets out proposals for the establishment of a Youth Council for West Berkshire in order to give young people a voice in local decision making.

2 Recommendations

2.1 That the Executive:

- (a) Agree to establish a Youth Council.
- (b) 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).

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|-------------------------|---|
| Financial: | As noted in the report, there are a number of additional costs. It is proposed that this will be funded through external contributions and a realignment of existing resources. |
| Human Resource: | HR does not advise on external processes or elections. |
| Legal: | There are no legal implications arising directly from these proposals. |
| Risk Management: | Safeguarding measures would be put in place to ensure the safety of members of the Youth Council. |

| | | | | |
|--|--|----------------|-----------------|---|
| Property: | N/A | | | |
| Policy: | The UK's approach to national policy on youth councils is currently in a state of development, with the government working on a new National Youth Strategy. | | | |
| | 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 | | | Membership of WBYF would be open to all young people and representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged, with provision for co-opted places. Also, the upper age limit would be extended to 25 for young people with SEND. These measures should ensure improved representation for people with protected characteristics. |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | X | | | Age is one of the nine protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act. The Youth Council would give young people the chance to discuss relevant issues, engage with decision makers and contribute to improving the lives of young people within their communities. Efforts would be made to support and enable appropriate representation on the Youth Council from people with other protected characteristics so that it would be inclusive in terms of ability/disability, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political belief, and religion. |
| Environmental Impact: | | X | | N/A |
| Health Impact: | | X | | N/A |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| ICT Impact: | | X | | N/A |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | The Youth Council would need to have dedicated pages within the Council's own website. This could be managed by the Participation and Engagement Worker. |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | X | | | <i>'Support the Youth Council'</i> is one of the actions listed under Objective 5A of the Council Strategy: <i>Encourage and support our local communities to take the lead in driving what is important to them.</i> |
| Core Business: | | X | | N/A |
| Data Impact: | | X | | |
| Consultation and Engagement: | Connor Markou (Senior Accountant) Nicki Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic Services) HR Neil Goddard (Service Director - Education) Rebecca Wilshire (Service Director - Children's Social Care) | | | |

4 Executive Summary

This report considers the establishment of a youth council in West Berkshire to allow local young people to have a voice in decisions that affect them, which is a priority set out in the Council Strategy. The report sets out a potential model based on best practice, including a draft terms of reference document and code of conduct.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 Youth councils are forums that represent the views of young people at a local level. Run by young people for young people, they give them a voice and enable them to make their views heard. They give young people the chance to discuss relevant issues, engage with decision makers and contribute to improving the lives of young people within their communities.

5.2 Currently, there is no youth council in West Berkshire. However, Priority 5 of the West Berkshire Council Strategy (Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice) seeks to achieve a desired outcome to *'encourage and support our local communities to take the lead in driving what is important to them'*. Young people are identified in the Strategy as a seldom heard group within our communities, and involving a new youth council in decision making is listed as a key action to enable them to *'have a voice in local issues'*. This report makes recommendations about how a youth council might work in West Berkshire.

Background

5.3 There are over 620 youth councils operating across all levels of local government. A desktop exercise was undertaken to review a sample of youth councils established by other top-tier local authorities. The desktop exercise was supplemented by interviews and email correspondence to understand how they have been set up and operate, and to learn from their experience.

5.4 Most youth councils have a membership in the age range 11-18, which mirrors the UK Youth Parliament. However, some have different age ranges (e.g. 11-21, 13-19, 14-19). One example uncovered by the desktop review has extended the upper age limit to 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

5.5 The size of youth councils varies widely. Of those considered by the review, the smallest comprises 14 members, while the largest has an upper threshold of 45 members. Having too few members runs the risk of not being sufficiently representative of the local community, and meetings not being quorate, while having too many could result in meetings becoming unmanageable. The average membership of those youth councils considered in the review was 29.

5.6 Youth councils may seek applications directly from individuals, or nominations through schools/colleges/youth groups. Some actively seek to directly co-opt members from under-represented groups (e.g., young people with protected characteristics, students not in mainstream education, young carers, or those involved with Family Help Teams). Members may be co-opted directly, or through elections. Elections are often held via schools and youth groups. Schools often include voting within PSHE sessions or tutor time, which helps to ensure engagement with the process. Youth council members are generally elected for a two-year term. It is inevitable that over a two-year term, some young people will need to resign from their position due to age, moving away, or competing commitments, so youth councils may make provision for co-option of members from existing youth groups in between elections.

5.7 Once elected, youth council members need to appoint various officer posts. As a minimum, these comprise a chair, vice chair, and secretary. Where they are given a budget or have fundraising powers, they will appoint a treasurer. Often youth councils appoint other officers to cover roles such as campaigner, researcher, PR officer, etc.

5.8 Meeting frequencies vary, but usually there is at least one formal meeting per month, often with informal meetings in between for training, teambuilding, or small group activity to work on manifestos, develop campaigns, progress initiatives, or prepare for events, such as community youth forums or conferences. A typical time commitment would be 2-3 hours per week. Although it is recognised that there will be times when individuals

are unable to make meetings due to personal or study commitments, most youth forums require members to stand down if they miss three or more consecutive meetings.

5.9 Each youth council is supported by at least one Youth Engagement Officer. They will be responsible for the running and administration of the youth council, ensuring the smooth running of the elections, providing training and induction for new members, administering social media sites, and supporting social, personal and educational outcomes for the members.

5.10 Youth councils typically have their own social media channels, which are usually administered by the Youth Engagement Officer for safeguarding reasons, but the content is determined by the Youth Council themselves. Similarly, they often have a micro-site or dedicated webpages within the host authority's website.

5.11 Youth councils generally require a small budget to cover aspects such as:

- Election costs (e.g., printing and publicity)
- Teambuilding activities
- Meeting venue hire
- Campaigns
- Events (e.g., annual conference)

5.12 Local authorities generally don't provide youth council members with an allowance, but many provide food at meetings, and some also reward members with fun activities in the school holidays (e.g., a day out at a theme park).

5.13 The first few months after a cohort of young people are appointed involve a significant amount of development work, with an induction, training, and teambuilding exercises. Beyond these activities, the first year of the two year term would typically have a focus on electing officers, engaging young people to understand their concerns and priorities, and writing a manifesto, with the second year focusing on implementing the identified priorities.

5.14 Engagement with the host local authority varies, but may include:

- Regular informal meetings with the leader of the council and/or director of children's services.
- Allocating time for members of the youth council to ask questions at council meetings.
- Receiving reports/updates on youth council activities at council meetings.
- Inviting youth council representatives attend scrutiny committee meetings.
- Council members/officers may be invited to attend meetings to talk about issues of interest to the Youth Council.

- Council members/officers may request agenda items at youth council meetings, but efforts are usually made to limit these to avoid them dominating agendas.

5.15 Youth councils generally have a dedicated terms of reference/constitution and in some cases, changes are made to the host authority's constitution to acknowledge their role and their formal interactions with the host authority.

Proposals

5.16 Additional officer resource would be required to set up and run the Youth Forum. Two members of staff would be required to attend each meeting and there would be a significant amount of officer time associated with holding the election, organising teambuilding events, organising the annual conference, supporting campaigns, administering social media, dealing with queries and supporting the individual members of the Youth Forum. It is estimated that there would be 21 meetings per year. It is estimated that the level of support required would be equivalent of 1 FTE officer. There is no capacity within Children's Services to provide this level of support, and so an additional Participation and Engagement Worker would need to be recruited. The estimated salary would be £28,142 - £32,061 per year. The costs of this will be funded through existing resources and by seeking external sources of funding to support these activities.

5.17 There may be an opportunity for the Youth Council to be affiliated to the National Youth Council once this has been re-established, which would allow for the election of young people to become members of the Youth Parliament. There would be an additional cost, but this is currently unknown, since the British Youth Council closed in 2024 due to financial challenges. However, a new proposal is in development.

5.18 Draft terms of reference and a code of conduct are set out in Appendices C and D and it is proposed that these be reviewed and updated by the Youth Council once it is up and running.

6 Other options considered

The alternative is not to pursue options to establish a Youth Council for West Berkshire. This would continue to diminish the ability of our young people to be involved in local democracy. Also, it would continue to prevent local young people, relative to those living in areas that do have a Youth Forum in place, from being included in a Youth Council.

7 Conclusion

The establishment of a Youth Council in West Berkshire is considered to be a positive step that will enable young people to have their voices heard in relation to decisions that affect them.

8 Appendices

Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment

Appendix C – Draft Initial Terms of Reference

Appendix D – Draft Initial Code of Conduct

Background Papers:

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

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 Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: all wards

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West Berkshire Council Equity Impact Assessment

TEMPLATE

March 2023

Contents

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Section 1: Summary details

| | |
|--|--|
| Directorate and Service Area | Children’s Services (<i>Service TBC</i>) |
| What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change). | West Berkshire Youth Council (WBYC) |
| Is this a new or existing function or policy? | New |
| 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). | It is proposed to set up WBYC to allow local young people to have a voice in decisions that affect them. |
| Completed By | Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer – Scrutiny and Democratic Services) |
| Authorised By | |
| Date of Assessment | 25 September 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>It is proposed to set up Youth Council to allow local young people to have a voice in decisions that affect them. This is an aspiration set out in the Council Strategy.</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>WBYC aims to ensure that the voices of young people are heard, and they able to express their opinions and ideas about issues that are important to them and to influence decision makers.</p> <p>WBYC will seek the opinions of local young people, represent their views, and campaign for changes that will improve their lives and outcomes.</p> <p>It is proposed that there should be up to 30 places on the West Berkshire Youth Council, with 24 elected places and 6 co-opted places. The co-opted places would be for young people from under-represented groups (e.g., those with protected characteristics, students not in mainstream education, young carers, or those involved with Family Help Teams). This would ensure that the widest possible range of views are represented.</p> <p>Young people can stand for election if they are aged between 11 and 17 years on the day of the election (or between 11 and 23 years for those with learning disabilities). This ensures a wide range of views and life experiences are represented.</p> <p>During the first year of office, members of WBYC will consult with local young people, prepare a manifesto and agree the campaigns that they wish to work on. Delivery of the campaigns would be in the second year.</p> <p>The Youth Council would organise an annual conference. This would provide a chance for young people across West Berkshire to come together and discuss issues of importance to them and to help plan WBYC’s priorities for the coming year.</p> |

Equity Impact Assessment

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>Members of the Youth Council would also be invited to attend meetings of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. This would provide them with an additional opportunity to ensure that young people have a say in decisions that affect them.</p> |
| <p>Evidence / Intelligence</p> <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> | <p>The proposals for WBYC have been identified following a review of existing Youth Councils and guidance/best practice in this area.</p> <p>The WBYC has been designed to be inclusive of all young people in West Berkshire, with particular efforts made to ensure that under-represented groups are included.</p> |
| <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>Some areas have Youth Councils where membership that is determined solely through nominations or elections. This model was discounted since it would not ensure that under-represented groups were included.</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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | The proposal would ensure that young people have more of a say in the decisions that affect them. | | | |
| Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYF will be open to all young people. The age range for young people with SEND will be extended to 25. | | | |
| Gender Reassignment | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYF will be open to all young people. Representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged. | | | |
| Marriage & Civil Partnership | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |

Equity Impact Assessment

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Pregnancy & Maternity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| Race | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYF will be open to all young people. Representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged. | | | |
| Sex | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYF will be open to all young people. Representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged. | | | |
| Religion or Belief | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYF will be open to all young people. Representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged. | | | |

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 type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Membership of WBYP will be open to all young people. Representation from under-represented groups will be encouraged. | | | |
| 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 | |
| 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: | Children's Services |
| Service: | TBC |
| Team: | TBC |
| Lead Officer: | TBC |
| Title of Project/System: | Youth Council |
| Date of Assessment: | 25 September 2025 |

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

| | Yes | No |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <p>Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data?</p> <p><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></p> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>Will you be processing data on a large scale?</p> <p><i>Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both</i></p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension?</p> <p><i>Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?</i></p> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>Will any decisions be automated?</p> <p><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></p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Equity Impact Assessment

| | 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"/> |
| <p><small>Note – this could include biometrics, “internet of things” connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised</small></p> | | |

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.

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Data Protection Impact Assessment

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment 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 Data Protection Officer via dp@westberks.gov.uk

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Directorate: | Children's Services |
| Service: | TBC |
| Team: | TBC |
| Lead Officer: | TBC |
| Title of Project/System: | Youth Council |
| Date of Assessment: | 10 October 2025 |

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

| | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| <p>Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data?</p> <p>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”</p> | X | |
| <p>Will you be processing data on a large scale?</p> <p>Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both</p> | | X |
| <p>Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension?</p> <p>Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?</p> | X | |
| <p>Will any decisions be automated?</p> <p>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?</p> | | X |
| <p>Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?</p> | | X |
| <p>Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?</p> | | X |
| <p>Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes?</p> <p>Note – this could include biometrics, “internet of things” connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilized</p> | | X |

If you answer “Yes” to any of the above, you will probably need to perform a DPIA. If you are unsure, please consult with the Data Protection Officer before proceeding.

Impact Assessment

What is it you're planning to do?

Explain the problem, need, issue or deficiency your project will address, and what kind of data processing it will involve. You may wish to include project plans or flowcharts.

Consider:

- **What do you want to achieve?**
- **What is the intended effect on individuals?**
- **What are the benefits of the processing for your service, and the organisation more broadly?**

It is proposed to set up a Youth Council to ensure the voices of young people are heard, and they are able to express their opinions and ideas about issues that are important to them and to influence decision makers.

It is proposed that there should be up to 30 places on the West Berkshire Youth Council, with 24 elected places and 6 co-opted places. The co-opted places would be for young people from under-represented groups (e.g., those with protected characteristics, students not in mainstream education, young carers, or those involved with Family Help Teams).

This would ensure that the widest possible range of views are represented.

Young people can stand for election if they are aged between 11 and 17 years on the day of the election (or between 11 and 24 years for those with learning disabilities). This ensures a wide range of views and life experiences are represented.

This would require processing of sensitive data in order to identify people with these characteristics.

Describe the nature of the processing.**Consider:**

- **How will you collect, use, store and delete data?**
- **What is the source of the data?**
- **Will you be sharing data with anyone?**
- **What types of processing identified as likely high risk are involved?**

You might find it useful to refer to a flow diagram or another way of describing data flows.

Data on protected characteristics would be collected via the nomination forms.

This data would only be used to inform the selection process for members of the Youth Council and would not be shared with any third parties.

No high-risk data processing is proposed.

| |
|---|
| <p>Describe the scope of the processing.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature of the data, and does it include sensitive “special category” or criminal offence data? • How much data will you be collecting and using? How often? How long will you keep it? Have you reviewed/arranged an entry in the corporate records retention schedule? • How many individuals are affected? |
| <p>The data would include certain protected characteristics of the nominee, such as race/ethnicity and sexual orientation in order to inform the selection of co-opted members of the Youth Forum and ensure representation from traditionally under-represented groups.</p> <p>Data will only be collected and processed as part of the nomination process and will be retained as long as necessary, in accordance with the Council’s Record Retention and Disposal Schedule.</p> <p>Individuals would not be affected by the processing other than to inform the selection of co-opted members. Sensitive data will not be shared with other members of the Youth Council.</p> |
| <p>Describe the context of the processing.</p> <p>Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much control will people have over their data? • Would they expect you to use their data in this way? • Do they include children or other vulnerable groups? • Are there prior concerns over this type of processing or security flaws? • Is it novel in any way? • What is the current state of technology in this area? • Are there any current issues of public concern that you should factor in? • Are you signed up to any approved code of conduct or certification scheme (once any have been approved)? |
| <p>As part of the nomination process, it would be made clear how the data would be used.</p> <p>The questions asked are standard for this type of usage, so it is not anticipated that there would be any public concerns, and there are no novel methods of processing that are proposed.</p> <p>There are no concerns about this type of processing or any security flaws that are anticipated.</p> |

Do you intend to consult with affected stakeholders? If not why not?

Consider/explain:

- **When and how you will seek individuals' views – or justify why it's not appropriate to do so.**
- **Who else do you need to involve within your organisation? Do you need to ask your processors to assist? Do you plan to consult information security experts, or any other experts?**

It is not anticipated that any consultation with affected stakeholders will be necessary.

Describe compliance and proportionality measures.

Consider:

- **What is your lawful basis for processing? Does the processing actually achieve your purpose? Is there another way to achieve the same outcome?**
- **How will you prevent function creep (using the data for more than the original purpose)?**
- **What information will you give individuals? How will you help to support their rights? What measures do you take to ensure processors comply? How do you safeguard any international transfers?**

Lawful basis would be:

- a) the data subject has given consent to the processing of his or her personal data for one or more specific purposes;
- e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller.

Data would only be used for the purposes of appointing co-opted members and ensuring representation of under-represented groups on the Youth Forum.

A privacy notice would be prepared to state how the data would be used and by whom.

All WBC staff have mandatory GDPR training with regular refresher courses.

There are no circumstances foreseen in which international transfers of data could take place.

Risk Assessment

Identify, list and classify risks.

| # | Include associated compliance and corporate risks as necessary <i>The Data Protection Principles are reproduced in Appendix A – you may wish to refer to these when identifying risks</i> | Likelihood of harm | Severity of harm | Overall risk |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Human error | Possible | Significant | Medium |
| 2 | Unauthorised access / data breach | Remote | Significant | Low |
| 3 | Data misuse | Remote | Significant | Low |
| 4 | Data quality issues | Possible | Minimal | Low |
| 5 | Technical failure | Remote | Minimal | Low |

| Risk Mitigation | | |
|-----------------|--|----------------|
| Risk # | Options to reduce or eliminate risk (Possible or Probable Risks only) | Effect on risk |
| 1 | Double checking records have been entered and stored correctly and ensure that all staff have completed GDPR training. | Reduced |
| 2 | Password protect the file and ensure that the Council IT systems have adequate security measures in place. | Reduced |
| 3 | Password protect the file, ensure that all staff have completed GDPR training. | Reduced |
| 4 | Double checking records have been entered and stored correctly and ensure that all staff have completed GDPR training. | Reduced |
| 5 | Ensure that the Council IT systems have appropriate back-up arrangements. | Reduced |

Approvals

This assessment must be approved before the project proceeds to implementation stage.

| | Signed | Date |
|---|--------|------|
| Data Protection Officer | | |
| DPO advice/actions: | | |
| Head of Service <i>Signature by Head of Service indicates acceptance of DPO advice unless expressly overruled with reasons</i> | | |
| This DPIA and completion of actions arising from it will be the responsibility of (insert name of responsible officer in service) | | |

Once approved, this document should be sent to dp@westberks.gov.uk

END

Appendix A

The Data Protection Principles (from the General Data Protection Regulations)

1. Personal data shall be:
 1. processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject ('lawfulness, fairness and transparency');
 2. collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is incompatible with those purposes; further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes shall, in accordance with [Article 89\(1\)](#), not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes ('purpose limitation');
 3. adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed ('data minimisation');
 4. accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date; every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay ('accuracy');
 5. kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed; personal data may be stored for longer periods insofar as the personal data will be processed solely for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes in accordance with [Article 89\(1\)](#) subject to implementation of the appropriate technical and organisational measures required by this Regulation in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of the data subject ('storage limitation');
 6. processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ('integrity and confidentiality').

West Berkshire Youth Council

Terms of Reference

(Initial Draft – August 2025)

Overview

Members of West Berkshire Youth Council (WBYC) are elected by the young people of West Berkshire to represent their views.

WBYC aims to ensure that the voices of young people are heard, so they are able to express their opinions and ideas about issues that are important to them and to influence decision makers.

WBYC will seek the opinions of local young people, represent their views, and campaign for changes that will improve their lives and outcomes.

Membership

Members of WBYC must satisfy one or more of the following criteria:

- Live in West Berkshire
- Attend schools or colleges in West Berkshire,
- be a member of a youth organisation that regularly meets in West Berkshire.

There are 30 places available on WBYC – 24 places are determined through elections via local schools and youth groups, with 6 co-opted places for young people who are:

- not in mainstream education
- members of under-represented groups
- young carers, or
- care-experienced

Young people can stand for election if they are aged between 11 and 17 years on the day of the election (or between 11 and 24 years for those with learning disabilities).

Membership of WBYC will be for a term of two years. Members may stand for re-election at the end of their two-year term, provided they still meet the criteria.

Members may resign at any point in their two-year term by giving one month's notice to the Chairperson.

A young person will cease to be a member of WBYC in the event of the following:

- they reach the age of 19 (or 26 if they have learning disabilities)
- they move out of the district, no longer attend a school or college in West Berkshire, or are no longer part of a youth organisation that regularly meets in West Berkshire;
- they are recorded as being absent for three consecutive calendar months of Youth Council meetings;
- when they give their resignation in writing

Members may be required to step down from WBYC if they fail to comply with the principles set out in the Code of Conduct.

Elections

Elections to WBYC will take place every two years.

The election timeline shall be as follows:

- September:
 - promotion through schools, youth organisations, the West Berkshire Council (WBC) residents newsletter, and social media
- October:
 - nominations open (all candidates must complete an application form)
 - information evenings are held about the Youth Council and the election
- November:
 - Nominations close
 - Each candidates creates a campaign video (with support provided for filming)
- December:
 - Candidates' information goes live on the WBYC web pages
- January:
 - Election packs are delivered to schools and youth organisations
 - Two week voting period
- February:
 - Election count and results evening
 - Youth Council members begin their term of office

For the co-opted members, communications will be sent to the Virtual School, the iCollege, the Reach Out Support Group for Young Carers, and other groups representing seldom-heard communities, inviting nominations. Applications will be anonymised and reviewed by members of WBYC with the successful candidates determined through a secret ballot of WBYC members. For the first year, appointments will be determined by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Officer Roles

At the first formal meeting of WBYC after the election (known as the 'Annual Meeting'), members will elect a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Public Relations Officer, and any other officers that they decide are necessary.

The Chairperson will be responsible for:

- the effective running of WBYC meetings
- agreeing meeting agendas
- ensuring all WBYC members are given the opportunity to speak at meetings and contribute to WBYC activities
- liaising with youth engagement workers about WBYC matters

The Vice Chairperson will be responsible for:

- helping the Chairperson with their responsibilities
- chairing meetings when the Chairperson is unable to attend meetings
- ensuring that other WBYC officers carry out their responsibilities

The Secretary will be responsible for:

- preparing meeting agendas and distributing these to WBYC members
- preparing minutes of each meeting and distributing these to WBYC members

The Public Relations Officer will be responsible for:

- preparing content for WBYC's social media channels and web pages
- writing press releases
- leading on the design of surveys
- ensuring that WBYC projects are inclusive and reflect the views of the young people of West Berkshire

Members of the Youth Council will also be invited to attend meetings of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to represent the views of young people in West Berkshire and help to shape the future of education and children's services.

Officers of the Youth Council will hold office for a period of one year, and will remain in post until the conclusion of the next Annual Meeting after their election.

If a vacancy occurs among the officers between Annual Meetings, WBYC will have the power to elect a replacement from amongst its members. They will hold office until the conclusion of the next Annual Meeting.

Role of the Youth Engagement Workers

Youth engagement workers will undertake the following roles:

- Ensuring the smooth running of the WBYC Elections
- Supporting the administration of WBYC
- Facilitating each meeting and providing resources
- Helping to organise the WBYC conference
- Overseeing administration of WBYC's social media channels.
- Running teambuilding exercises.
- Providing ongoing advice and guidance to WBYC members
- Supporting measurable social, personal, and educational outcomes for WBYC members.
- Exercising safeguarding duties on behalf of WBC

Meetings

There will be 12 formal meetings of the Youth Council each year.

The first formal meeting of each year will be the Annual Meeting. At each Annual Meeting, the business shall include:

- Agreement of the annual report on the activities of the Youth Council for presentation to West Berkshire Council.
- The election of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and other officers.

All other formal meetings shall run to an agenda agreed by the Chairperson.

If the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson are absent, the first agenda item will be to appoint a Chairperson for that meeting. If the Secretary is absent, then a temporary secretary will be appointed to record the minutes.

Any member who holds an elected role must give feedback about what they have done in their role at each formal meeting.

Any WBYC member can ask for a topic or motion be added to an agenda by contacting the Chairperson at least 10 days in advance of the meeting.

If a member would like to invite an external guest, then the member should inform the Chairperson and the supporting Youth Engagement Worker and explain why they would like the guest to attend.

West Berkshire Council (WBC) officers/councillors, or other partner organisations may request agenda items at formal WBYC meetings. Only one 20 min slot will be given to WBC/external partners per meeting in order to prevent these items from dominating the agenda. Additional time may be negotiated at the discretion of the Chairperson. Such requests should make it clear why the Youth Council is being

engaged and how their contribution will affect any associated decision making.

If multiple topics/motions are proposed for the same meeting, the ones that are to be debated will be chosen by the Chairperson.

Agendas shall be sent to WBYC members one week before the meeting, along with the minutes from the last meeting.

Informal meetings will be held between the formal meetings. These will be used for the following purposes:

- Induction and training
- Teambuilding
- Manifesto development
- Campaign development
- Planning events or other activities

Decision Making

Motions will be debated and voted on at formal meetings.

There must be at least 10 WBYC members present for a vote to take place. Voting will take place on each motion by a ballot (anonymous vote). In the case of a tied vote, the Chairperson may be given a casting vote.

The record of any debated motions will be recorded by the Secretary within the minutes of the meeting.

Campaigns

During the first year of office, members of WBYC will consult with local young people, prepare a manifesto and agree the campaigns that they wish to work on.

Campaigns should be district-wide rather than specific to a particular location.

Communication and Publicity

WBYC will give a report to Full Council once a year on their campaigns and activities.

Agendas and minutes for each formal WBYC meeting will be published online to allow members of the public to view topics. This will be the responsibility of the Youth Engagement Worker.

WBYC will have an information page on the West Berkshire Council website, which will include:

- Current WBYC members
- The current manifesto
- Links to meeting agendas and minutes
- Updates on campaigns and events
- The latest annual report

WBYC members will be informed of youth council meetings and event dates via a WhatsApp account; it will not be open as a chat group. Members of the WBYC must have parental consent before signing up to the WhatsApp group.

WBYC members may also give face-to-face presentations and assemblies to raise the profile of the BCYC.

POLITICAL VIEWS

WBYC is a non-party political organisation and must present a neutral stance on political issues.

Members may hold allegiance to/be a member of a political party, but they cannot express their party political views as a Youth Councillor.

Members can meet with any political party at any time as long as their Youth Council membership is not used in any way to gain votes for that party.

West Berkshire Youth Council

Code of Conduct

(Initial Draft – August 2025)

As a member of West Berkshire Youth Council (WBYC), you are expected to:

- Represent the views of the young people of West Berkshire.
- Promote equality for all young people through WBYC activity.
- Commit to attending at least 75% of formal WBYC meetings.
- Send apologies to the Chairperson or Youth Engagement Worker when you are unable to attend formal meetings of WBYC. If you are absent for three meetings in a row, you may be asked to step down from WBYC.
- Treat everyone with courtesy and respect.
- Ensure you do not use your WBYC membership to the support, endorse or benefit any political party.

You must not:

- Engage in bullying or intimidating behaviour.
- Use inappropriate language, say things or act in any manner that others may find offensive when acting in your capacity as Youth Councillor.
- Be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs at any WBYC meetings or events.
- Use your position as Youth Councillor to seek or accept preferential treatment.
- Disclose any confidential information unless given express permission to do so.

At meetings:

- Mobile phones should be on silent and put away.
- Raise your hand when you wish to speak and wait for the Chairperson to indicate that it is your turn – do not interrupt others when they are speaking.
- Remember that everyone's opinion is valid and should be respected

- Please listen to all points of view before finalising your decision
- Support and help all members to feel included and participate in meetings.

Please sign below and hand it back to the Youth Engagement Worker to show that you have read the Code of Conduct and agree to observe the principles set out within it.

I (name)

agree to abide by the Youth Council's Code of Conduct, as set out above.

Signed:

Date:

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 18 December 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Nigel Foot |
| Report Author: | Clare Lawrence |
| Forward Plan Ref: | EX4757 |

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To respond to the Task and Finish Group report and recommendations presented to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 16th 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. This report considers any lessons learnt and responds to the recommendations to inform the Council’s approach to future sports and leisure projects.

2 Recommendations

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:

1. Strengthening the Projects service to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council’s project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.
2. Undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
3. Embed the output of this review through training for all who have roles within project delivery (i.e. PMs, sponsors)
4. Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the finance quarterly monitoring reports to the Executive
5. Review how time recording can be implemented and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
6. 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.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------------|---|
| Financial: | There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. | | | |
| Human Resource: | There are no HR implications arising directly from this report. | | | |
| Legal: | No Legal Implications arising directly from this report | | | |
| Risk Management: | There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report. The recommendations will ensure that project management methodology and documentation is improved to minimise risk | | | |
| Property: | There are no property implications arising directly from this report. | | | |
| Policy: | There are no policy implications arising directly from this report. | | | |
| | 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 | | There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report. |

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p> | | x | | <p>The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.</p> |
| <p>Environmental Impact:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Health Impact:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no health impacts arising directly from this report. However, the recommendations refer to the Playing Pitch Strategy and Faraday Road project which will impact positively on sport and leisure activity.</p> |
| <p>ICT Impact:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no ICT impacts arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Digital Services Impact:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no impacts for Digital Services arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Council Strategy Priorities:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no Council Strategy Priorities arising directly from this report although the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations relating to project management will support the council to deliver on the Administration’s key priorities.</p> |
| <p>Core Business:</p> | x | | | <p>Improving project governance is part of the core business of delivering services.</p> |
| <p>Data Impact:</p> | | x | | <p>There are no data impacts associated with this report.</p> |
| <p>Consultation and Engagement:</p> | <p>A full list of stakeholders and expert witnesses consulted through the work of the Task and Finish Group’s is set out in the attached report.</p> | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 A Task and Finish Group was established by the Scrutiny Committee (now the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee) to review the Sports Hub Project and had six objectives primarily focussed on determining if the proposal represented value for money to deliver council objectives and whether consistent advice was given to members. The group also considered the way that the project was managed.
- 4.2 This report, and the recommendations made, were considered by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 16th September 2025. The original report contained 27 recommendations although recommendations 23 and 25 were not supported by the Committee.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.0 A Task and Finish Group was established by the Scrutiny Committee (now the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee) to review the Sports Hub Project. Its report was presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 16th September 2025.
- 5.1 This report reviews and responds to the 25 recommendations of the Committee based on the conclusions of Task and Finish Group made in light of evidence it considered. The Task and Finish Group's report is contained in Appendix 1 and sets out the objectives of the group, the witness and documentary evidence considered, and its findings based on the key objectives. The recommendations are set out in the report. Appendix 2 contains the report to the Resources and Place and Scrutiny Committee on 16th September 2025.

Background

- 5.2 The Task and Finish Group was established to focus on the following six objectives:
- (1) To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money.
 - (2) To determine whether the project would have delivered on the council's strategic objectives.
 - (3) To determine whether the project was well managed.
 - (4) To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.
 - (5) To determine whether the council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision.
 - (6) To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).
- 5.2 The 25 Task and Finish Group recommendations agreed by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee are set out below:

| Ref | Recommendation | Task and Finish Group Priority |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Objective One: To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money | | |
| 1. | Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been considered, including cost comparisons. | High |
| 2. | The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board. | High |
| 3. | Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale. | High |
| 4. | Hours spent on capital projects by ‘business as usual’ staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a ‘partner’ in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly. | Medium |
| 5. | The council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned. | High |
| 6. | The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available. | High |
| 7. | When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability. | High |
| 8. | If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers’ money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere. | High |

| Objective Two: To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives | | |
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| 9. | Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly. | High |
| 10. | The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons. | High |
| 11. | Stage E Reviews of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured. | Low |
| 12. | The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted. | High |
| Objective Three: To determine whether the project was well managed | | |
| 13. | All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council. | High |
| 14. | Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any exceptions should be agreed by the project board. | High |
| 15. | The Executive Leadership Team should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness. | Medium |

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

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| 16. | Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance. | High |
| 17. | Senior managers and Executive members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are. | High |
| 18. | All projects need to have a project closure report. | High |
| 19. | The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work. | High |
| 20. | The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project. | Medium |
| <p>Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles</p> | | |
| 21. | Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice. | High |
| 22. | When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers, they must ensure members and the public receive clear communication. | High |
| 23 | Recommendation not supported by the Resources and Place Committee | |

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| 24. | Complete records of FOI requests must be kept, including reasons for responses to requests. This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released. | High |
| 25. | Recommendation not supported by the Resources and Place Committee | High |
| Objective five: To determine whether the Council’s decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision | | |
| 26. | The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to proceed with it, and all project accounts completed. | Medium |
| 27. | A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, and had its own budget line. | Medium |
| Objective six: To establish whether the Council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward) | | |
| n/a | There were no recommendations arising. | |

Response to Task and Finish Group Report and Recommendations

5.3 The Task and Finish Group considered background information and extensive information from local community representatives. Based upon the information the group considered, it concluded that there were other options available to the Council to deliver the sporting facilities that represented better value for money than the Sports Hub proposal and that there is no evidence that the Council ever considered these options.

5.4 The response to the recommendations is set out below:

Response to recommendations

| | Recommendations | Response | Action |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been | Agreed - It is important that all policy and strategic objectives are considered and it is acknowledged objectives often compete or overlap. Prior to the initiation of projects, project | Undertake review of project management documentation including business case templates, |

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

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| | considered, including cost comparisons. | briefs and business cases are taken through robust member and officer governance groups to ensure that their delivery aligns with these objectives. | prioritisation tools and project health checks. |
| 2 | The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board. | In place for major projects through current project management methodology | No further action-in place |
| 3 | Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale. | Agreed | No further action-in place |
| 4 | Hours spent on capital projects by 'business as usual' staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a 'partner' in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly. | Partly Agreed – The Council will review how it can record officer time against capital and high priority projects. It is considered that project managers and staff would not require finance officer support if training is provided about time recording. | Review how time recording can be implemented in a cost effective manner and the level/type of projects that this would apply to. |
| 5 | The Council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned. | Agreed – this is the current approach | No further action-in place |
| 6 | The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available. | Agreed – the Council reviews projects and will not progress these if there are other alternatives that meet strategic objectives in a more cost effective to | No further action-in place |

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| | | meet the desired outcomes. | |
| 7 | When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability. | Agreed - The Council will consider appropriate alternatives if they are supported by robust and quality assured business cases to demonstrate that they are viable, meet the strategic objectives and follow necessary legal requirements including procurement regulations. | No further action- in place |
| 8 | If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers' money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere. | Partly agreed- Business cases are submitted for all capital projects. Some projects include partnership with private entities when there is a strong reason to do so and these private entities will expect to be recompensed accordingly. | No further action |
| 9 | Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly. | Agreed in principle- Funding for projects is set out in the capital budget and further in year proposals are considered, debated and agreed in public by the Executive. It is not feasible for all projects to be presented in detail in the public arena due to the number of these but all funding bids are subject to business cases which will be available to | Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the finance quarterly monitoring. |

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| | | the public in line with Freedom of Information Request Regulations. In addition, there are mechanisms open to residents to ask public questions about projects at Executive and Council | |
| 10 | The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If Members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons. | Agreed - The new playing pitch strategy is considering all deliverable viable options including agricultural land and land at North East Thatcham. Deliverable options will be tested on a value for money basis | No further action-in place |
| 11 | A Stage E Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured. | Agreed- All governing bodies for Sport are part of the steering group informing the development of the Playing Pitch Strategy based on the evidence base | No further action-in place |
| 12 | The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted. | Partly agreed - The Council has a range of processes for public consultation and with town and parish councils. These include Community Forums and the District Town and Parish Forum. | No further Action |

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| | | <p>The Council also undertakes full public consultation on new and amended strategies and delivery plans in line with the constitution and where it considers there will be a public interest. However, not all</p> <p>However, given the number of projects delivered, it is not possible to undertake full public consultation on all on these. However, should they require planning permission, consultation will be undertaken at this stage.</p> | |
| 13 | <p>All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council.</p> | Agreed | <p>This is in place, however the newly restructured Projects Service will undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.</p> |
| 14 | <p>Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any</p> | Agreed | No further action-in place |

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

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| | exceptions should be agreed by the project board. | | |
| 15 | Executive should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness. | Agreed | Skills audit of project delivery officers to be undertaken. Further training to be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology |
| 16 | Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance. | Agreed | No further action- in place |
| 17 | Senior managers and Executive Members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are. | Agreed – Major project documents are stored by Corporate Programme Office. | No further action - in place |
| 18 | All projects need to have a project closure report. | Agreed- in place and closure reports are signed off by senior officers and members as well as used for lessons learnt reviews. | No further action - in place |

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| 19 | <p>The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work.</p> | Agreed | Documents to be shared. These are publicly available documents |
| 20 | <p>The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project.</p> | Agreed | To log the Task and Finish Groups report in the central repository |
| 21 | <p>Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice.</p> | <p>Partly agreed – If the Planning service considers that there is a need for the Legal team to check planning committee reports, these are referred to them. The Legal Team do check those that need their input and attend planning committees to advise</p> <p>Should the position change between a planning application being considered by the Western or Eastern Area Planning Committees when presented to the District Planning Committee, this change will be reported. However, when applications are referred to District Planning Committee, it will be this</p> | No Further Action |

Sports Hub – Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report

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| | | committee's responsibility to determine the application without reference back to the area committees in line with the Councils constitution. | |
| 22 | When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers they must ensure Members and the public receive clear communication. | Agreed- Planning Committee and Executive reports should be clear and transparent addressing relevant issues | No Further Action – in place |
| 23 | Recommendation removed | | |
| 24 | Complete records of FOI requests must be kept including reasons for response to requests. This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released. | Agreed | No Further action – in place |
| 25 | Recommendation removed. | | |
| 26 | The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to Proceed with it and projects Accounts should be completed | Agreed | To ensure that following Executive decisions, projects are updated/closed as agreed |
| 27 | A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project should start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, | Agreed in Principle | The Council is strengthening the Projects service |

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| | and have its own budget line. | | to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council’s project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure. |
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6 Other options considered

- 6.1 The Council could agree with all of the recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee but some of these are considered to be not appropriate to adopt for the reasons set out above.
- 6.2 The Council could agree not to adopt the recommendations set out in this report but this would undermine the opportunity to make improvements to project management which would undermine the Council’s ability to deliver on its priorities.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 The Council is committed to ensuring that Council projects achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. The Council is transparent about the rationale for supporting projects which is set out in reports to Executive or through business cases which are available to the public in line with Freedom of Information Regulations.
- 7.2 The Council continuously reviews projects against its strategic objectives and refreshes business cases accordingly. The Council has the courage to abandon proposals as evidenced by the recent decision not to progress with the Resource Centres proposal. It is also open to considering alternative viable proposals supported by the community.
- 7.3 The Council is supportive of many of the recommendations by the Resource and Place Scrutiny Committee and in many cases, these are in place requiring no further action.
- 7.4 The Council is actively strengthening the Projects Service in response to the administration’s strategic objective to centralise project delivery to ensure it is

consistent and of high quality. Key improvements underway include a comprehensive review of the Council's project management methodology (PMM) to ensure that all projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure. This review encompasses the standardisation and quality assurance of project documentation, including business case templates, prioritisation tools, and project health checks, to enhance transparency and auditability. Further training to be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology.

- 7.5 The Projects Service structure has also been refined to clarify roles and responsibilities, with a particular focus on ensuring that project leaders receive appropriate training and support, and that the skills of those within the service align with the needs of the organisation. This has also seen the move of a number of officers from across the Council into a centre team which further improves assurance.
- 7.6 These actions collectively aim to embed a culture of continuous improvement, accountability, and strategic focus within the Projects service, ensuring that future projects maximise value for money and deliver positive outcomes for West Berkshire.
- 7.8 The supported recommendations of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee requiring further action are:
- Recommendation 1 - Undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
 - Recommendation 4 - Review how time recording can be implemented and the level/type of projects that this would apply to.
 - Recommendation 9 - Introduce quarterly status reporting for all Tier 1 projects in an appendix to the capital quarterly monitoring
 - Recommendation 13 – While this is place, the newly restructured Projects Service will undertake a review of project management documentation including business case templates, prioritisation tools and project health checks.
 - Recommendation 15 - Further training will be provided to project leaders to reflect new methodology
 - Recommendation 19 – 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
 - Recommendation 20 – To log the Task and Finish Group's report in the central repository in the Corporate Programme Office
 - Recommendation 21 - Strengthening the Projects service to centralise project delivery including a review of the Council's project management methodology to ensure that key projects are governed by and monitored through appropriate, robust processes from inception to closure.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Report

8.2 Appendix B – Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Report 16th September 2025

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
-

Sports Hub task and finish group report

Introduction

The task and finish group had seven objectives, taken from the terms of reference agreed by Scrutiny Commission.

1. To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money
2. To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives
3. To determine whether the project was well managed
4. To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to Members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles
5. To determine whether the Council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision
6. To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).
7. To determine what lessons can be learned from this project.

For each of the first six objectives, the report provides 'Background information and evidence provided'. Objective seven is fulfilled by providing 'Recommendations' for those six objectives.

Members of the task and finish group included Councillor Carlyne Culver (chairman), Councillor Jeremy Cottam, Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor David Marsh and Councillor Chris Read. Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer for Scrutiny & Democratic Services) was clerk to the task and finish group. The task and finish group met four times: three times to take evidence, and once to finalise the report.

Members of the task and finish group consider this to be an evidence-based and robust report and support its recommendations.

For the avoidance of doubt, where this report refers to 'Members', it is referring Members of the Task and Finish Group unless stated otherwise.

Witnesses (in alphabetical order)

- Sharon Armour (Legal Services Manager)
- Laura Callan (Service Lead - Planning)
- Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources)
- Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Chief Financial Accountant)
- Bob Dray (Development Manager)
- Councillor Nigel Foot (Executive Portfolio Holder: Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside)
- Joseph Holmes (Interim Chief Executive)
- Peter Lambert (Newbury Rugby Club)
- Paul Martindill (former Leisure Consultant)
- Lee McDougall (Newbury Community Football Group)
- Drew McHenry (Principal Sport and Leisure Officer)
- Paul Morgan (former member of Newbury Community Football Group)
- Alan Pearce (claimant in judicial review)
- April Peberdy (Service Director - Community Services)
- Jude Thomas (Sport and Leisure Manager)
- Councillor Howard Woollaston (Shadow Portfolio: Housing, Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside; Public Safety)

Documentary evidence

The documentary evidence considered by the task and finish group included the following.

- Sports Hub project documents supplied by sport and leisure officers
- Cost figures provided by officers and the current portfolio holder
- Playing Pitch Strategy and Stage E Review 2022
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Western Area Planning Committee agenda pack (15 December 2021)
- Executive decision 4149 (16 December 2021)
- District Planning Committee (2 March 2022)
- Executive decision 4332 (23 March 2023)
- LRIE task and finish group
- Indicative Business Plan for the Newbury Football Ground - provided by Newbury Community Football Group
- Six page document of observations and costings provided by Newbury Community Football Group
- Claimant Skeleton Argument (relating to the judicial review)
- WBC 'Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance' presented to the High Court (22 September 2022)
- Approved judgment (relating to the judicial review)
- Meeting minutes and emails between the Council and Sport England
- Various emails from witnesses providing information ahead of, and following, the witness sessions they attended

Detailed minutes of the four evidence sessions were drafted and their contents were also used to inform the content of this report.

Objective One: To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money

Background information and evidence provided

- The Council's Playing Pitch Strategy, adopted in February 2020, identified its number one priority as 'Faraday Road Stadium' and the relocation thereof. The Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review of September 2022 confirmed that this remained the number one priority and identified the need for 9-11 artificial grass pitches in total. A budget of £5.6m was allocated. However, this was insufficient, so the Council was only seeking to deliver six 3G pitches in a five-year period. Construction inflation post-Covid and the declaration of war in Ukraine took the cost of a 3G pitch from £650,000 - £750,000 to around £1m.
- The procurement strategy dated 10 March 2021 states a budget of £1.79m, a sinking fund of £25,000, and a revenue budget of £103,000.
- The cost of the proposed Sports Hub was £3.878m according to Executive decision EX4332 of 23 March 2023. Officers said this figure was only an estimate of the construction cost. Consultation and design costs were separate.
- Newbury Community Football Group submitted a document to the task and finish group, claiming that the total cost of ownership of the Sports Hub to the Council, excluding loan interest, over a 40-year period was a minimum of £11,580,000 including capital construction, lease premium, annual rent, sinking fund, annual subsidy and grass pitch loss mitigation. Noting that in March 2023, when the revised capital costs for the Newbury Sports Hub were approved by Executive, the Public Works Loan Board Annuity Rate was 5.03 per cent, the

Group argued that this would equate to interest payments of circa £137,000 per annum for 40 years.

- Newbury Community Football Group said that prematurely closing Faraday Road had resulted in loss of income for the Council from lease payments. They made the case that the Council could meet its target of six new 3G sports pitches in a five-year period, for the same cost as the Sports Hub project. Officers were unable to confirm whether a comparative analysis had been carried out between the cost of the Sports Hub and the cost of providing six 3G pitches in other locations across West Berkshire.
- At the time of giving evidence to the task and finish group, officers said a full size 3G pitch with no additional facilities costs around £1m. For such a pitch Sport England suggests a sinking fund of 2.5 per cent (£25,000) and maintenance fund of 0.5 per cent (£5,000).
- Officers said that it is their understanding, through conversations with Jon Wood at Berks and Bucks FA, that grant funding from the Football Foundation is awarded on a case-by-case basis and it would be difficult to determine the amount that could be saved across multiple pitch builds within the district. The Football Foundation analyses how well demand is met in an area, therefore the first pitch would likely secure grant funding of up to 80% of the total cost (due to a lack of artificial grass pitches in the area), but subsequent builds may not be entitled to similar funding, or indeed any funding.
- In 2021, Newbury Community Football Group published a business case to reopen Faraday Road, approved by Sport England. The scheme would cost £1.1m for a 3G pitch and floodlights and provide a football ground for the whole community seven days per week from 9am to 10pm throughout the year. This would include a 3G football pitch with changing rooms that could be used for training sessions and organised football matches at all levels, with a valid performance test that could be used for league matches and FA competitions, and a clubhouse that could be used as a source of income. This option would have had an advantage over the Sports Hub where the Rugby Club would have been given priority at weekends, which would have restricted use for football at the very times when demand was highest. The Football Foundation and Sport England had offered to fund 75% of the cost of the works. A self-sustaining business case had been approved by Sport England, which would not have required the Council to pay any subsidy, rent, or sinking fund.
- The Newbury Community Football Group prepared a business case in January 2021 included a total cost (excluding VAT) £727,000 for the pitch including legal and professional advice, excavation, preparation, drainage, lighting, fencing, goals. It also included a total cost (excluding VAT) £1,051,000 for the clubhouse and pavilion including demolition of existing buildings, construction and fit out of pavilion, covered stand, turnstiles, kiosk and PA system.
- Councillor Woollaston was unable to confirm if this option had been explored. From the above figures it appears that reopening Faraday Road would have provided better value for money than the Sports Hub, but there is no evidence that the Council ever considered this as an option. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish group report in 2020 recommended 'For future large-scale projects OSMC should satisfy itself that the Council tests the market fully and assesses partners to ensure value for money'.
- NCFG obtained full planning permission for a 3G pitch and outline permission for a clubhouse. However, at the time of giving evidence to the task and finish group, these planning permissions were about to expire. The Council owned the site and had made it clear that the planning permission would not be utilised.

- Manor Park was earmarked as a replacement for the loss of a grass pitch at the Rugby Club. It had an oil pipeline underneath it and the Council was liaising with the pipeline's owner. It was estimated to cost £400,000 including importing material and levelling the site. It was noted that Henwick Worthy also lay on the pipeline, but it had been levelled without the need to import material. Officers said Sport England recommends for full size grass football pitches a sinking fund of 3.2 per cent (£12,800) and maintenance budget of 16.5 per cent (£66,000), amounting to a total yearly expenditure of £78,800. Officers said there were options for replacement grass pitches at Thatcham and Linear Park in Calcot, but Members were not shown any costings for those sites.
- The Council engaged consultants, Sports Turf Research Institute, to evaluate two sites as potential mitigation for the loss of the grass rugby pitch at Monks Lane. The STRI recommended the Holybrook Linear Park site in December 2021 and could hardly have been more damning of the alternative, at Manor Park, Cold Ash. It said the soil was “not conducive to the development of a rugby/football pitch surface”; the site was on a flood plain and drainage was too poor to ensure year-round playability; it was on a slope and “quite a considerable amount of material would need to be imported to create a pitch platform”; an oil pipe crossed the site; there was not enough parking; there were no changing or toilet facilities; the proposal contained a threat to “good trees and ecological elements”. It concluded: “It is recommended not to develop this site due to the limiting factors and it is recommended to develop the Holybrook Linear Park as an alternative.” This report, presumably commissioned at some expense to the Council (how much remains unclear), was inexplicably not taken into consideration, and in May 2022 a public consultation was launched into the Manor Park site (but not the Linear Park one). Councillor Woollaston defended the choice of Manor Park for a grass pitch (Newbury Today, 5 August 2022) as “the best short-term [sic] solution”, referring to the Playing Pitch Strategy and the need for more artificial pitches.
- Councillor Woollaston wrote to the task and finish group following his evidence to say agricultural land was investigated but no sites were found that the Planning Team deemed would be acceptable. These discussions were informal and not recorded in minutes. The lack of documentation means Members are unable to confirm whether these discussions took place, or judge whether the use of agricultural land would have provided better value for money. Members are of the opinion that it should have been recorded in the ‘decision log’ of the project. Evidence of request for sites with landowners should also have been maintained for audit purposes.
- Of the top three priorities in the current Playing Pitch Strategy, only John O’Gaunt School (priority three) had been delivered. A Stage E Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy is supposed to be undertaken annually with national Governing Bodies (the Berks and Bucks FA in the case of football) but has not happened since September 2022. There had been no responses to a tender exercise, which had resulted in additional delay. Officers confirmed that the Council started a new Stage E review, but the feedback from the National Governing Bodies was that the Playing Pitch Strategy should have a full refresh because much had changed since Covid, so the review was halted. The process of producing a new strategy is being led by the same provider that prepared the Henwick Worthy Masterplan, and the aim is to complete it by June 2025.
- There had been a contractual agreement with joint venture partner, St Modwen, that required vacant possession of the Faraday Road football ground. Members suggested that when the deal with St Modwen was found to be unlawful, there was no need for vacant possession and the ground should have been reopened. Furthermore, Faraday Road could have been reopened following the dismissal of the Newspaper House (19/01281/OUTMAJ) planning appeal on 8 October 2020, on flooding grounds. At that point it was clear that built

development on the site of the Faraday Road pitch would be unviable for the same reason. However, officers said the majority of the Faraday Road Football pitch site is in Flood Zone 1, so the site could be suitable for development without conflicting with planning policy, albeit flood risk would need to be addressed. The Faraday Road pitch site is not allocated in the Local Plan and planning applications on unallocated sites would be considered on their merits. Officers said the planning position is fundamentally different on the Newspaper House and Faraday Road sites despite their proximity.

- Newbury Community Football Group said that by funding and subsidising the Sports Hub via the taxpayer, rather than applying for external funding to the Football Foundation, the Council had no obligation to adhere to Sport England's guidance regarding financial sustainability. In October 2021, in response to the Council's business plan, Sport England challenged the rationale for the Council providing £90,000 revenue support per annum, warning that it was 'a major risk if this were to be reduced or removed'. They continued 'Over the 40-year lease period and excluding any inflationary increases, this as minimum would equate to £3.6m, which would be much better spent on addressing the facility needs across West Berkshire'. Sport England also said the £41,000 rent was extremely high and asked whether this was sustainable, to quote 'Over the 40 years lease as a minimum (excluding rent reviews/increases) this would equate to £1.64m income to the Rugby Club, as well as the free use of the 3G'. In a second response in November 2021, Sport England said they had consulted the FA and RFU who both had concerns about the project's reliance on Council subsidy.
- Officers told Members that such levels of revenue support were considered overblown by all contractors that responded to the sports and leisure management contract tender. The winning bidder thought the Sports Hub could break even within the first year, but Members were not shown an evidenced justification for the winning bidder's claim.
- The Sports Hub project would have represented considerable financial benefit for Newbury Rugby Club. Providing funds to the Rugby Club to help keep it afloat was viewed as a bonus by the Council. Payments due to be made to the Rugby Club included an initial payment of £250,000, £41,000 per annum for 40 years once the pitch was playable (with a break clause at 20 years), and £11,000 in legal fees. In the end, only the £11,000 legal fees were paid, and they went directly to solicitors. The £250,000 lease premium would have been given on condition that it was used to improve the club's facilities.
- The Rugby Club witness confirmed that the project came into being because they had been approached by the Council. The Council was stuck, and this option was the last resort, which the Rugby Club considered in its negotiations. The Rugby Club incurred no expenditure. It would have benefited from the initial lump sum payment and the annual rental income. Long-term maintenance would have been the Council's responsibility.
- The Rugby Club had only considered the proposal because of its financial position. Whilst once very successful, with first class facilities, the Club had been repeatedly relegated, had lost sponsorship, could no longer afford to pay its players, and was left with a ground that was expensive to maintain. It had survived by selling off land, but it had spent the proceeds of these sales. The Club had no more land that it could sell, so it had welcomed the approach from the Council. The Rugby Club was aware the Council had decided to offer this opportunity to no other landowner and hence had the upper hand in negotiations. The Rugby Club had not felt like a partner in negotiations. There had been no interest in what the Club wanted to do for rugby and the community.
- The Rugby Club is now in a much stronger and sustainable financial position.

- The Council did not negotiate aggressively enough with the Rugby Club, bearing in mind the latter had existing facilities, including a club house, changing rooms and showers, and physio room, which are all underutilised.
- Members were concerned that the Council was proposing to use public funds to favour external entities, the Rugby Club in the case of the Sports Hub, and Newbury Town Football Club in the case of the reopening of Faraday Road where it was still unclear whether, and how often, any other groups could book the facility.
- Members invited Sport England to give evidence directly to the task and finish group but they responded, “Sport England made its planning recommendations on the evidence presented to it during the life of the relevant planning applications. We consider your current deliberations to be an internal matter and must therefore respectfully decline to attend”.
- Members asked for all Sports Hub project costs to date, and officers provided the following from the November 2023 Executive report that proposed the Council would not proceed with the Sports Hub project. The total figure was £214,537.90-£219,537.90.

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| Pre-construction costs | £126,585.00 |
| Legal fees, in respect of the land transaction documentation and DMA | £46,802.90 |
| Legal fees in respect of planning including the Judicial Review: Planning advice: £3,401.50 Judicial review: £33,748.50 Sub-Total: £37,150.00 Less recovered costs (Judicial Review): £11,000.00 | £26,150.00 |
| Additional estimated legal costs of decoupling the Sports Hub from the Everyone Active contract | £5,000-£10,000 |
| Adjustment in management fee to Everyone Active, should the Sports Hub be removed from the contract (not yet confirmed) | £0 |
| NRC's legal costs – due | £10,000 |
| Total | £214,537.90- £219,537.90 |

- Officers said the cost of the interim consultant was met through capital cost centres. They then said the leisure consultant worked on several projects and they do not believe these were coded separately. Members were not given a figure for total staff time spent on the project. Officers stated that leisure team time is not coded to specific projects. This seems to be at odds with usual Council practice. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended ‘All officers’ time should be recorded when dealing with large scale projects’.
- Members are of the opinion that revenue costs must not be used to subsidise capital projects. If a capital project uses ‘business as usual’ staff, their hours must be tracked against the project, otherwise the project is cutting into revenue costs which are under great pressure. The council can claim back tax against capital investment projects, but not against revenue spend.

| Recommendations | Priority |
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| 1.) Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been considered, including cost comparisons. | High |
| 2.) The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board. | High |
| 3.) Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale. | High |
| 4.) Hours spent on capital projects by 'business as usual' staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a 'partner' in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly. | Medium |
| 5.) The council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned. | High |
| 6.) The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available. | High |
| 7.) When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability. | High |
| 8.) If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers' money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere. | High |

Objective Two: To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives

Background information and evidence provided

- The Playing Pitch Strategy of 2020 states that the number one priority was Faraday Road Stadium and the relocation thereof. This was reiterated in the Stage E Review of 2022.
- Based on the findings relating to objective one above, it could be argued that the best way to have achieved the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy would have been to re-open Faraday Road. This would have represented better value for money and been quicker to achieve. The Sports Hub would not have been a replacement *in fact* because it did not have the capacity to develop beyond Step 4, whereas Faraday Road had the potential to

achieve Step 2. (Step 1 is the highest step.) It is worth noting that Hungerford is currently playing at Step 3 and Thatcham at Step 4, so it would not be unreasonable to expect that Newbury FC could progress beyond Step 4. Also, the Sports Hub was only intended as a base for Newbury Football Club. Other 3G pitches within the PPS would have replaced provision for children’s football and other uses. However, it must be borne in mind that the Sports Hub was intended to be a 3G pitch and could therefore be used more often than the grass pitch at Faraday Road.

- While Newbury Community Football Group were supportive of the Sports Hub as a standalone facility, they did not consider the Sports Hub to have the capacity to be a replacement for Faraday Road, and therefore did not agree that it met the number one priority of the Playing Pitch Strategy. They had the following concerns about the Sports Hub project:
 - There was a planning restriction preventing football matches being played on Saturdays if there was also a rugby match being played.
 - Peak time for children’s football was Sunday morning, which would not have been permitted under the lease agreement.
 - There was no guarantee of access on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday evenings.
 - The site was very constrained. The pitch was too small for rugby, there was insufficient space for spectators and the site restricted the aspirations of Newbury FC.
 - The clubhouse proposed for Monks Lane was much smaller than at Faraday Road and could not be used to generate revenue on non-match days. This would have fundamentally affected the financial viability of the club.
 - Parking would have been run by a third party.

- Members noted the update report to Western Area Planning Committee, which highlighted that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy and the fact it was a replacement for Faraday Road were relevant material considerations. Therefore, Council strategies not only guide how public funds are spent, but they also carry weight in planning decisions.

- One limited consultation (see appendix one) took place in January-March 2021, which contained no detail about the project and asked only about the general principles. There was no opportunity to opt for retaining the pitch at Faraday Road. The Executive decided in April 2021 not to proceed to a full public consultation, despite the scale of the project and the financial implications. The council failed to engage with the Newbury Community Football Group or Newbury Town Council at any stage of the process. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended ‘The Council should review and improve how it consults and engages with those who may be affected by the Council’s proposals. Significant projects such as this should have a clear communications plan with a list of key stakeholders’.

- There are further references to the Playing Pitch Strategy under objective four below.

| Recommendations | Priority |
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| 9.) Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and | High |

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| transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly. | |
| 10.) The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If Members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons. | High |
| 11.) A Stage E Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured. | Low |
| 12.) The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted. | High |

Objective Three: To determine whether the project was well managed

Background information and evidence provided

- At the task and finish group's first meeting in November officers responsible for sport and leisure were not able to answer many of the Members' questions because they said they had not been involved in the Sports Hub project. At the second meeting in December, officers said that the development of the project, and associated project management, was outsourced to Alliance Leisure Services (ALS). They are an established developer within the industry and were procured via the UK Leisure Framework as a 'one-stop' solution for complete design and build from inception to delivery. Officers said ALS would have maintained much of the detailed project documentation.
- Although a business case had been developed for the Sports Hub, it had not been updated. Officers provided project board agendas, minutes, and action logs, but they could not confirm which documents were shared at each meeting. Minutes were sparse and lacked context, and there were no gateway reviews. Officers also provided a communication strategy, risk management strategy and risk register, and procurement strategy. Officers said they had submitted all project documentation that they could draw from the Sports Hub project files, but because the project was managed externally, and owned by officers no longer at the Council, that was all that could be found in the accessible folders. Documentation is important for the purposes of audit and scrutiny, but it is clear that record keeping was poor. It should be noted that the LRIE task and finish report in 2020 recommended 'The Council's Record Retention Policy should be reviewed to consider whether it is fit for purpose and being implemented uniformly across the organisation'.
- Officers said because this was never an established project, some documents may not have been developed (however it is evident that the project entered the Planning Stage or Design Stage which is an established in-project stage). It was suggested that officers may have been waiting for approval of the implementation phase before adopting the full project management approach. However, it was acknowledged that this was not within the strict interpretation of PRINCE2. It is concerning to Members that officers do not consider it an

established project when it was agreed by Executive in December 2021 to allocate £3.351m to complete the development of the Sports Hub, and according to a November 2023 Executive report the total costs to date were £214,537.90-£219,537.90.

- ALS were contacted and sent the Council the following documents: proposed planning conditions tracker, risk register, indicative programme, programme narrative, and cost certainty report. Officers believe the project manager for the Sports Hub no longer works with ALS. In Members' opinion it should not matter whether personnel at the Council or at one of its contractors have changed because the documentation should be properly archived.
- Officers confirmed that the Council's Project Management Methodology followed the principles of PRINCE2 while ALS used their own project management framework. Members noted the lack of PRINCE2 documentation such as the RAIDD log, information on assumptions, issues, dependencies, decisions logs, and so on. It was noted that PRINCE2 could be implemented at a reduced level, but any changes in approach should be agreed at the outset. Officers said that because the project did not progress beyond the planning stage, and a contract was not signed for delivery of the project, there would be less project documentation, and they would not expect to have a lessons learned document for a project. It would only have been considered a major project when it progressed to the construction stage. Members were not convinced by this and are of the opinion that documentation should be produced from project initiation, not after planning permission has been secured.
- Officers said the principal project risk register was held by ALS as project managers and WBC held a client risk register. They said they did not believe that a RAIDD log is part of the Council's project management methodology. An action log was held by the Council. Bearing in mind a paper went to Executive in March 2023 containing updated costs for the project, the last updates on the risk register were 16 May 2022 and the last update on the action log was 24 August 2022, according to the documents shared with Members. Members are concerned that insufficient attention was given to updating information.
- ALS would have managed change control and, as they were procured to deliver the project at an agreed cost, the Council would expect ALS to deliver to budget and not expect to see budget accounts unless there was an issue. Officers provided a Cost Certainty Report dated February 2023, Phoenix Report (breakdown of costs changes between Cost Confidence and Cost Certainty) and an Exception Report seeking additional funding and extension to time dated October 2021.
- It is not clear why the project managers did not follow the project management methodology and why the governance boards did not spot that the required PRINCE2 products were not being produced. There is no evidence that either the project board or the project managers can demonstrate that the products were produced, reviewed and signed off, or formally requested exemption from the delivery of the required products. Members believe there is clear evidence that both governance boards and project managers did not know what they should have known.
- The task group considers that the project was not properly controlled or managed, and project tolerances including scope, time and costs, were either not established or monitored. Project management good practice was not followed. It is not clear that decisions were made based on all the information available or that appropriate information was sought for the best value outcome of taxpayers and service users.
- The LRIE task and finish group report in 2020 states 'OSMC should satisfy itself that the Council has in place appropriate project management methodology. This should be tested in

order to provide assurance that this is now operating effectively and consistently across the organisation.’ At the OSMC meeting when the report was presented, Councillor Jeff Brooks expressed his frustrations regarding project management and project documentation. The Executive response stated: ‘The Council has a PMM which is continually being updated and improved. Training is currently being rolled out to managers across the Council. Checks are undertaken by the corporate programme office to ensure compliance / exception reports are taken to Corporate Programme Board.’ The Executive response concluded ‘No further action – in place’. More recently the Risk Management Strategy document presented to Executive on 12 December 2024 stated ‘The Council’s approach to risk management from a project and programme perspective has improved through increased training on the Project Management Methodology (PMM) based on PRINCE 2 principles’.

- Officers could not recall whether lessons learned from the LRIE task and finish group had been shared.
- It was confirmed that in 2023, internal governance training had been provided to all senior staff (Service Leads and above). This had covered the Council’s project management methodology and governance structure. There is a step-by-step guide to project management toolkit on the intranet. Members found no evidence of training about the Council’s project management methodology when taking evidence from officers responsible for sport and leisure.
- An officer told Members that training in PRINCE2 for new project managers, and refresher training for qualified practitioners, had not taken place since 2021 because there is no budget for training. The Interim CEO acknowledged that training budgets had been squeezed in recent years, but assurance was given that relevant staff had been trained in PRINCE2, Agile or Waterfall, and there were also some project management apprentices. In terms of training budgets, it was confirmed that any bids would be assessed in accordance with current priorities.
- In terms of governance, the Sports Hub was reporting to Corporate Projects Board until 2022. The Council then changed its governance arrangements, so the reporting pathway for major projects is now to Corporate Board before going to Corporate Programme Board, which includes all the relevant Executive Portfolio Holders. This is in addition to any project/programme specific governance (e.g., PPS Steering Group).
- It was confirmed that the Council’s Programme Management Office (PMO) had grown over time, to deliver increased internal support for project management. Projects were tiered according to risk via an online tool, which defined reporting and governance.

| Recommendations | Priority |
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| 13.) All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council. | High |

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| 14.) Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any exceptions should be agreed by the project board. | High |
| 15.) Executive should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness. | Medium |
| 16.) Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance. | High |
| 17.) Senior managers and Executive Members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are. | High |
| 18.) All projects need to have a project closure report. | High |
| 19.) The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work. | High |
| 20.) The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project. | Medium |

Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to Members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles

Background information and evidence provided

- Former portfolio holder Councillor Woollaston announced in a public webinar on 17 March 2021 that Monks Lane was a replacement for Faraday Road, saying “We started off from the presumption that we needed to find an alternative site” because Faraday Road was needed for “economic regeneration”. Three other sites they had looked at were unsuitable, so they spoke to the Rugby Club, and this was the “very best option”. At Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 Councillor Woollaston was minuted as saying “The Council’s aspiration for economic and housing regeneration on the London Road Industrial Estate necessitated a replacement for the pitch on Faraday Road”.
- The Sports Hub application was considered at the Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 and District Planning Committee on 2 March 2022. Readers of this report might find reference to the timeline, appended to this report, useful to understand how the narrative around the Sports Hub project changed.

- The Sports Hub was described as a replacement for Faraday Road in the following documents:
 - Page 44 of the agenda pack for Western Area Planning Committee on 15 December 2021 states: ‘The Playing Pitch Strategy includes the specific objective of providing a replacement football facility for the Faraday Road Ground’ and ‘WBC and Sport England have submitted a joint statement which states that they are both jointly supporting the development proposals at Newbury Rugby Club as an enhanced replacement... for Faraday Road Stadium, in line with the Playing Pitch Strategy.’ The update report for the meeting stated: ‘...it is clear from the report and recommended conditions that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration in the case of this application.’
 - In Executive decision 4149 of 16 December 2021 ‘To approve the allocation of £3.351M to complete the development of Newbury Sports Hub and thereby achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS)’ and ‘The Newbury Sports Hub provides an enhanced replacement for the Faraday Road Stadium. If the Newbury Sports Hub project is not brought forward, an alternative replacement site will need to be found before the LRIE regeneration project can be progressed.’
 - In Executive decision 4332 of 23 March 2023 ‘RESOLVED that Executive approve the allocation of £3.878M to complete the development of Newbury Sports Hub and thereby achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy...’

- However, the Sports Hub was described as not being a replacement for Faraday Road in the following documents:
 - Page 20 of the agenda pack for District Planning Committee of 2 March 2022 stated: ‘... there is no formal link between the current application and any separate development plans or planning application that may emerge in the future in relation to the Faraday Road Stadium, London Road Industrial Estate or its replacement’.
 - Page 15 of the Defendant’s Detailed Grounds of Resistance of 22 September 2022 (the Council’s defence in the judicial review) stated: ‘In short, officers correctly advised Members that the application for the Proposed Development was indeed a “stand-alone” proposal with “no formal link” to FRS.’ Page 17 says, ‘The Council therefore rejects the submission in the Speaking Note that “the development of the two sites were part and parcel of the same overall scheme” and that “the decision to grant permission for the NRC [Rugby Club] site was intrinsically bound up with the future of the FRS” and “would lead directly to the permanent loss of the FRS sports ground”.

- Between the Western Area Planning Committee meeting on 15 December 2021, and the District Planning Committee meeting on 2 March 2022, Alan Pearce made the Council aware of his intention to make a legal challenge. He did this in a planning objection letter of 31 January 2022, published on the Council’s planning website on the 4 February 2022.

- Officers told the task and finish group that they were content that the advice had been factually correct at both planning committee meetings, and there had been no intentional misdirection.

- The grounds for the judicial review were:
 - Ground 1(i): Members were materially misled insofar as they were directed to treat the application as a “stand alone proposal” with “no formal link” with the Faraday

Road Site and that the future of the Faraday Road Site formed “no part” of the consideration of the planning application

- Ground 1(ii) the Defendant erred in law by treating, on the one hand, the proposed development as a replacement for the provision at the Faraday Road Site, but on the other hand treating the proposed development as a “stand alone proposal” and in failing and expressly refusing to consider or compare the implications of the proposed development for the Faraday Road Site
- The claimant’s submission said: ‘It appears that between the Western Area planning committee meeting and the District planning committee meeting, it must have been recognised that recommending the Sports Hub for approval as a replacement was inconsistent with the position reached with Sports England, but the implications of that were not grappled with properly, clearly or consistency. Hence the position at District planning committee: an attempt to present the Sports Hub proposal as something other than it was.’
- The Defendant’s Detailed Grounds for Resistance said:
 - Ground (1) para 47 ‘In short, officers correctly advised Members that the application for the Proposed Development was indeed a “stand-alone” proposal with “no formal link” to FRS. The Permission does not, and does not purport to, authorise any development of any kind at FRS.’
- The judicial review was rejected, concluding that the claim failed on both grounds. The judgment was handed down on 3 February 2023. The judge said in paragraph 29 ‘The permission does not involve the loss of the football stadium and that is why it was considered, as it should have been, on a stand-alone basis. That emphasis was needed to make clear that the permission would not result in the loss of the football stadium within the meaning of CS18 and or result in the football stadium being built upon within the meaning of NPPF paragraph 99.’
- The aforementioned legal documents were all made available to the task and finish group by judicial review claimant Alan Pearce. The chairman of the task and finish group contacted the Monitoring Officer on 23 January 2025 asking to see the legal advice given to the council ahead of its defence in the High Court. A document was shared with the chairman to assist with the task and finish review, but she was advised that it could not be shared in whole or part with any third party.
- If one accepts the advice given to Members of District Planning Committee and the conclusions in the High Court, it surely follows that the Council was incorrect to claim at Western Area Planning Committee and in Executive papers that the Sports Hub was intended to replace Faraday Road and thereby meet the number one priority of the Playing Pitch Strategy. This poses questions: what is the point of a strategy if it is not going to be used to guide the Council’s actions and why were Members of Western Area Planning Committee advised in an update report just ahead of their meeting that ‘...it is clear from the report and recommended conditions that the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration in the case of this application’? An Executive paper, published the week before Western Area Planning Committee and presented at Executive 24 hours after the planning meeting, said the Sports Hub was a replacement. Members of Western Area Planning Committee voted for what they were told was a replacement, not ‘a “stand-alone” with “no formal link” to FRS’ as the Council’s legal defence later stated.
- On 13 July 2021 there was a meeting involving former Council leader Councillor Lynne Doherty, former portfolio holders Councillor Howard Woollaston and Councillor Ross Mackinnon, former CEO Nick Carter, former officers including one of whose names was

redacted, Charles Johnston (Property Director, Sport England) and one of his colleagues. The minutes quoted: “[Redacted] added that any planning application for the Sports Hub needed to clearly state that Monks Lane was a direct replacement for Faraday Road.” When Nick Carter “sought clarification on the rationale for this link to be identified”, the unidentified officer “confirmed that the link needed to be made in order to satisfy the NPPF”.

- The National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Paragraph 99 states ‘Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless... b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location’. Faraday Road had the potential to be a Step 2 facility, while the Sports Hub did not have the capacity to progress beyond a Step 4 facility. The Western Area Planning Committee paperwork described the Sports Hub as a replacement for Faraday Road, but internal witnesses to the task and finish group including Councillor Woollaston claim it was only intended to be a ‘partial’ replacement: a base for Newbury Football Club, while other 3G pitches within the PPS would have replaced provision for children’s football and other uses. Members at District Planning Committee were told that there was ‘no formal link’ between Faraday Road and the Sports Hub. If it was intended to be a ‘partial’ replacement, or not a replacement, in either case it was non-compliant with the ‘equivalent or better’ stipulation in NPPF paragraph 99.
- The Sports Hub was not described as a ‘partial’ replacement in the Executive or planning documents. It is not clear to Members whether this is an attempt to create a rationale after the facts, or further illustrative of the confusion about what the Sports Hub project really represented. To be clear, Manor Park was intended to be a replacement for the loss of an existing grass pitch at Monks Lane where the Sports Hub was to be built. It was not the case that Sports Hub + Manor Park = replacement for Faraday Road.
- Officers told the task and finish group that the role of the Local Planning Authority was different to that of the Council as scheme promoter. For the project team, the funding picture and Faraday Road were primary considerations, but not for the Local Planning Authority. In officers’ opinion, the application was to replace the fifth training pitch at Newbury Rugby Club with the Sports Hub, and although it was presented as a partial mitigation for Faraday Road the granting of planning permission would not have forced the closure of Faraday Road. They said a replacement for Faraday Road would only become an issue once a planning application was submitted for that site.
- Officers said policy CS18 (Green Infrastructure) of the Local Plan was the focus for the planning decision. This required green infrastructure, including outdoor facilities, to be protected, or if lost, to be replaced by an equal or better facility. The Sports Hub was considered a betterment when compared to training pitch 5, given that it could be used more intensively. However, the task and finish group note that the application was never presented as a ‘partial’ replacement in planning or Executive papers, and in Western Area Planning Committee and Executive papers it was presented as a replacement for Faraday Road not a betterment compared to training pitch 5. Officers reiterated there was no scope for the Local Planning Authority to refuse the application on the grounds of what was happening at Faraday Road. The learning that officers had taken away was that advice needed to be clearer about the key consideration, in this case compliance with CS18.
- Paul Morgan, Chair of Newbury Community Football Group until September 2023, said members of the group submitted FOI requests to the Council and to Sport England for all correspondence between the Council and Sport England, during the period 31 March 2021 to 30 April 2022, regarding the Sports Hub and Faraday Road. He said pre-application discussions between the Council, Sport England, the Football Association and the Football

Foundation had been clear that the Sports Hub was intended as a replacement for the Faraday Road facility. Discussions indicated that failure to link the Faraday Road site to the planning application would result in objections and the application being rejected. At a meeting in May 2021, Sport England highlighted the inherent links between a.) Faraday Road, b.) the Sports Hub and c.) a replacement for the loss of a grass pitch at the Rugby Club, and they suggested that three planning applications should be submitted at the same time. The Council's response to the FOI requests contained considerably less than the Sport England response. The Council's response only contained documents from the planning team.

- Members asked to see the final statement that Sport England made on the Sports Hub project. Nothing could be found on the Council's document system and nothing was forthcoming from Alliance Leisure Services. This is concerning because they were a key consultee. This document should have been kept along with other documentation.
- Officers said there was no requirement to provide replacement facilities until the LRIE development had started. The Executive paper of 16 December 2021 stated, 'If the Newbury Sports Hub project is not brought forward, an alternative replacement site will need to be found before the LRIE regeneration project can be progressed'. External witnesses were concerned that the longer Faraday Road stayed closed and degenerated as a site (including an abandoned pitch, loss of spectator stand, and the clubhouse's destruction by fire), the less likely the Council would feel obliged to replace what had been there originally.
- Officers said Monks Lane was the best option available given that the political administration at that time did not want football to return to Faraday Road. There had been a contractual agreement with joint venture partner, St Modwen, that required vacant possession of the football ground. The aspiration had been to redevelop the whole of the Faraday Road Industrial Estate to create high quality jobs in an accessible location close to the town centre and public transport interchanges.
- The then Council leader attended Western Area Planning Committee as a substitute on the evening the application was determined and voted to grant planning permission, when the following evening's Executive paper supporting the Sports Hub was already in the public domain. Members believe that where the Council was the applicant and the Executive were advocating for the application, it follows that Members of that Executive attending a planning committee are pre-determined. A Committee member challenged this at the start of the meeting and the legal officer advised it was up to individual Members, if they were concerned they might be biased or prejudiced, to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer.
- Officers said that if Members of the Executive were required to consider such an application at a planning committee in future, the Monitoring Officer should advise them to abstain in the vote. The Task Group did not think this went far enough because this would still allow the Executive Member to influence the debate. Members asked if such applications could be referred straight to District Planning Committee. While officers said this was not permitted currently, the Constitution could be changed. It was noted that the whole Council had determined the planning application for the Vodafone HQ site. However, this would require all Members to have received planning training.
- Members of the task and finish group conclude that if one accepts the advice given to Members of District Planning Committee and the conclusions in the High Court, it follows that the advice given to Western Area Planning Committee – that the Sports Hub was a replacement for Faraday Road – was incorrect. Officers and the former portfolio holder described the project as only a 'partial' replacement when giving evidence to the task and finish group, suggesting they knew it was not a full replacement for Faraday Road. The Sports Hub was not a replacement *in fact* because it was intended as a Step 4 facility, not capable of reaching Step 2 as Faraday Road was. However, it is acknowledged that a 3G pitch at the Sports Hub could have been used more heavily than the former grass pitch at

Faraday Road. There was no shared understanding among the then Executive Members and Council officers about the rationale for the Sports Hub, which there should have been because the Council had a Playing Pitch Strategy that clearly stated that the number one priority was Faraday Road and the relocation thereof. The alternative to this conclusion is that the then Executive and officers really did believe it was intended to be a replacement, in which case the advice given at District Planning Committee and the Council's defence in the High Court is called into question.

- Note that the project was described as having 'no formal link' at District Planning Committee on 2 March 2022 and in the High Court defence between August 2022 and January 2023, but it would 'achieve the delivery of the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy' (ie Faraday Road and relocation thereof) in the Executive of 23 March 2023. While the legal defence was ongoing the Playing Pitch Strategy Stage E Review took place in September 2022 and confirmed that the number one priority was still Faraday Road and relocation thereof. So, the Sports Hub was presented as a replacement at Western Area Planning and an Executive, then described as 'no formal link' at District Planning Committee and in the High Court, and then a replacement again at Executive. Despite the Council's successful High Court defence arguing that the Sports Hub had 'no formal link' to Faraday Road, the Executive continued to justify it on the grounds of its link to the number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy – ie Faraday Road and the relocation thereof.
- The Group considers that the Council's advice and decisions regarding the Sports Hub were contradictory and confusing. It appears that the High Court defence hung by a thread from the word 'directly' (page 17 of the Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance referred to above) because one might argue that a planning approval letter for the Sports Hub would not in and of itself have set in stone the final abandonment of Faraday Road for sport, but it certainly would have given the Executive the green light they sought.
- At an additional evidence session on 16 June 2025, Members asked why the narrative had changed between Western Area Planning Committee and District Planning Committee which had seen the Sports Hub go from a replacement for Faraday Road to a stand-alone scheme. Officers explained that Sport England had requested a condition linking the two facilities for the Western Area Planning Committee application, but they had subsequently withdrawn the request for the District Planning Committee application. The High Court had agreed there was no link when the application was considered by DPC. It was noted that the Western Area Planning Committee update sheet had indicated that 'the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy are the relevant material consideration'. The number one priority in the Playing Pitch Strategy is Faraday Road and the replacement thereof. Officers stressed the differences between the functions of the Local Planning Authority and the Executive. It was confirmed that the Playing Pitch Strategy had been considered by the High Court. When taken as a whole, the proposal was considered to be compliant with the PPS. The key difference between Western Area Planning Committee and District Planning Committee was the withdrawal of the Sport England condition.
- The Task Group considers that this testimony creates the impression that a request from Sport England was the reason the Sports Hub and Faraday Road were linked. Sport England submitted their comments to the Council before Western Area Planning Committee, not afterwards. Sport England was only able to comment on the Sports Hub planning application on a Sport England Exception 5 basis (rather than an Exception 4 basis) because there was no live planning application for Faraday Road. It is clear from the Western Area Planning Committee papers considered on 15 December 2021, Executive decisions 4149 and 4332, meeting minutes and email correspondence between the Council and Sport England (which is all publicly available following FOI requests) that it was the Council driving the narrative that the Sports Hub was a replacement for Faraday Road.

- Officers stressed that the High Court had been told everything about the history of the case, and this had been cited in the judgment. Officers confirmed that Members were told of the differences in the Council's roles as Local Planning Authority and landowner. Officers accepted that there may be learning points around how to communicate the separate legal functions of the Council acting as LPA and the Executive acting as landowner/scheme promoter. It was acknowledged that this may be confusing to the average layperson and required 'mental gymnastics'. Officers stressed the need to be clear and transparent about the separation of the functions of the Local Planning Authority and the Executive. Planning could only have regard to relevant planning matters at the time that an application was considered. It was suggested that there should be learning from this case to ensure explanations were clearer in future. Officers suggested that training and communications could be improved.
- Officers indicated that while planning reports were not routinely checked by Legal due to resource constraints, more scrutiny was provided where reports were referenced up to District Planning Committee. The Sports Hub report had been discussed with Legal and Planning Officers' views had been further refined.
- What is in no doubt is that reliable and consistent advice was not given to Members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles. This is unacceptable and must not happen again. It has eroded trust in the Council.

| Recommendations | Priority |
|---|----------|
| 21.) Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice. | High |
| 22.) When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers they must ensure Members and the public receive clear communication. | High |
| 23.) When the Council is the planning applicant and/or the project concerned is being promoted by the Executive, Members of the Executive should not vote on that application at planning committee meetings. They should either be substituted for that meeting or, if present, they should declare that they are predetermined and take no part in the debate or vote while the application is being considered. This is essential to retain the trust of the public in the planning decision making process. This should be added to the Constitution. | High |
| 24.) Complete records of FOI requests must be kept, including reasons for responses to requests This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released. | High |
| 25.) The Council must refer itself to the Local Government Ombudsman and ask them to consider the contents of this report. | High |

Objective five: To determine whether the Council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision

Background information and evidence provided

- Councillor Foot, Executive Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside gave evidence to the task and finish group. He said the Liberal Democrats election manifesto of 2023 made it clear that they intended to bring football back to Faraday Road. This had since been achieved, with the site passing its Step 7 ground inspection. It was recognised that the current facilities did not fully replicate those that had been present in 2018.
- Cllr Foot felt that reopening Faraday Road would help to deliver the Playing Pitch Strategy and was a strategically and financially sound decision. Faraday Road had the scope to be developed, as the men's and/or women's teams progressed up the leagues, while the Sports Hub would have been constrained to Step 4.
- At Executive on 7 November 2024, Council Leader Councillor Jeff Brooks responded to a public question regarding the costs of restoring football to Faraday Road. He said, "Since November 2023 the costs and commitments to date are as follows: The preparation of the football pitch and the surrounding grounds including the ball catch fencing is £79,500; The Installation of previously supplied changing rooms, clubhouse and toilet facilities is £58,500; The covered stand cost £17,000; The Portable and moveable flood lighting cost £5,000; The Portacabin connection to utilities cost £17,000; The Security fencing and pitch side spectator barriers cost £16,600; The short-term hire of a portalo for public use cost £485; The Plumbing cost £27,500; The provision of electrical connections cost £23,700. Therefore, a total of £395,000".
- The Countryside Manager provided the following figures to the task and finish group: 2023/24 £239,000 and 2024/25 £191,500 totalling £430,500. The Service Director – Environment provided the following information for the Scrutiny Commission action log: 'Phase 1, which involved returning the pitch to football use, was completed in November 2023 and cost £239,000. Phase 2 involved upgrading the facilities to allow league matches to be played completed at the end of November 2024 and cost an additional £244,000. The next stage is to understand the feasibility of constructing a 3G pitch at the site. Consultants have been appointed to undertake the design and investigation, which is due to be completed by the end of the financial year and will cost £27,000'. This totals £510,000. Following the conclusion of the task and finish group meetings, but before publication of the report, Councillor Foot provided a figure of £499,720.62 spent between the start of the 2023/24 financial year and 12 February 2025.
- The plan is to increase use at Faraday Road. Although it was currently a grass pitch, junior matches were being played in addition to senior matches. There would have been limited scope to accommodate women's football at the Sports Hub. Prior to 2018, this had been accommodated at Faraday Road. The aspiration for Faraday Road was to provide a facility that was big enough to accommodate training sessions, and matches for adult men and women, as well as juniors. Over time, the administration would look to improve the stands and clubhouse, with existing facilities repurposed elsewhere in the district.
- A feasibility study was being carried out to inform the new Playing Pitch Strategy. Consideration would be given to how a 3G pitch could be achieved at Faraday Road.
- Members were told that the refurbishment of Faraday Road was funded through Countryside Service budgets and the Playing Pitch Strategy budget. The Playing Pitch Strategy budget contributed £100,000. Officers said no projects had to be shifted back in the programme, nor

dropped because of the work on Faraday Road. They were not asked to offer up a capital saving because of Faraday Road. They said the Faraday Road funding came from what was allocated to the Sports Hub at the Rugby Club. However, when Members requested the Sports Hub costs to date (ie at November 2023 when the Council decided not to proceed with the project) Faraday Road costs were not included (see table above in this report).

- Members sought clarification as to how much was left in the Playing Pitch Strategy budget. Finance officers confirmed the following total spend per year and said further spend is expected against this budget in 2024/25.

| | |
|---------|------------|
| 2021-22 | 142,850.00 |
| 2022-23 | 142,852.15 |
| 2023-24 | 16,629.32 |
| 2024-25 | 13,776.62 |
| Total | 316,108.09 |

- Officers said capital bids have been submitted for future years and are as follows: 2025/26 £340,000, 2026/27 £500,000, 2027/28 £500,000, 2028/29 £500,000.

| Recommendations | Priority |
|--|----------|
| 26.) The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to proceed with it. All project accounts should be completed. | Medium |
| 27.) A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project should start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, and have its own budget line. | Medium |

Objective six: To establish whether the Council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane

Background information and evidence provided

- The current administration does not have any plans to implement the original Sports Hub proposal at Monks Lane, despite the fact it is the second biggest project in the 2024/25 capital budget (note that at the time of writing this report we are still in the 2024/25 financial year), but it was suggested that there may be potential to deliver a playing pitch at the site as part of the new Playing Pitch Strategy.
- The project is in the process of being closed so there is no funding in the budget for 2025/26.

Appendix one: Consultation

There were two aspects to the consultation, carried out in March-April 2021. The first was a webinar, conducted on 17 March 2021 by Paul Anstey (the then officer responsible for the project) and Councillor Howard Woollaston (the portfolio holder) who made it clear that from the start that Monks Lane was being pursued because a replacement was needed for the Faraday Road ground. He told the webinar: "We started off from the presumption that we needed to find an alternative site." The second was an online consultation carried out in March-April 2021, which attracted 349 responses. (This was obtained only after a member of the public made an FoI request.)

The questions were:

- How far to you agree with our proposals to provide a new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club?
- How far do you agree with our proposal that the new sports ground should be a Step 6 facility?
- How far do you agree that different sports sharing a facility is a good idea?
- How far do you agree with our proposal that the playing pitch constructed at the new sports ground is artificial?
- What facilities would you like to see provided at the proposed sports ground? (Options were: bar and kitchen; car parking; club house, including welfare facilities; floodlights; seating; other)
- Do you think we should prioritise access for particular age groups?
- Do you think this proposal will improve your opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity?

At this stage (it had only been announced a matter of weeks earlier) there was very little detailed information about the proposal. For example, the nature of the deal with the rugby club and its associated costs, or the implications of replacing a grass pitch with an artificial one (and thereby having to find and fund a "replacement for the replacement"). So no one had a chance to raise these crucial issues.

The task group considers that the questions, which appear to have been specifically designed to elicit favourable answers (with very little for anyone to object to), did not include the alternative of retaining the existing ground at Faraday Road, as many of the responses pointed out. Despite its limitations, the fact that it received a patchy reception, and that no further public consultation of any kind was carried out throughout the lifetime of this project, this survey was used by the council leader to claim repeatedly that the Monks Lane proposals had popular support and had been subject to thorough public consultation. In reality, no one, including Council Members, had a chance to seriously question or have a say about this until the planning committee meetings, much later.

Appendix two: Timeline

See separate document.

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Sports Hub Task & Finish Group Report

| | |
|--|--|
| Committee considering report: | Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of Committee: | 16 September 2025 |
| Task & Finish Group Chairman: | Councillor Carolyne Culver |
| Date Task & Finish Group agreed report: | 30 July 2025 |
| Report Author: | Councillor Carolyne Culver |

1 Purpose of the Report

This report presents the findings of the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group, 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. The report makes recommendations based on the evidence gathered, which (if implemented) would help to inform the Council’s approach to future sports and leisure projects.

2 Recommendation(s)

To consider the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations as outlined in Section 6 of this report and agree whether these should be referred to the Executive for consideration.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|------------------------|---|
| Financial: | There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in financial implications which will be assessed in detail in the response to the Exec |
| Human Resource: | There are no HR implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in HR implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward. |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <p>Legal:</p> | <p>Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are set out in this report for consideration by the Executive.</p> <p>Recommendation 25 outlines that the Council should refer itself to the LGSCO. This would be highly irregular. If there is a suggestion of any proposal or decision of the Council has given rise to or is likely to or would give rise to any illegality, maladministration or breach of statutory code, the Monitoring Officer is under a duty to prepare a report to Council under Sections 5 and 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (LGHA 89).</p> <p>It may be appropriate for the report to be considered in private under Local Government Act 1972 schedule 12A to ensure that individual offices are not identified. This will be a decision of the Monitoring Officer balancing the public interest in disclosing such information.</p> <p>If the recommendations are accepted, there are likely to be legal implications arising.</p> | | | |
| <p>Risk Management:</p> | <p>There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted by the Executive, this may result in risk management implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.</p> | | | |
| <p>Property:</p> | <p>There are no property implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted by the Executive, this may result in property implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.</p> | | | |
| <p>Policy:</p> | <p>There are no policy implications arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations are accepted, this may result in policy implications, which will be assessed in detail if they are taken forward.</p> | | | |
| | <p>Positive</p> | <p>Neutral</p> | <p>Negative</p> | <p>Commentary</p> |
| <p>Equalities Impact:</p> | | | | |

Sports Hub Task & Finish Group Report

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?</p> | | X | <p>There are no equalities implications arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</p> | | X | <p>The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics.</p> |
| <p>Environmental Impact:</p> | | X | <p>There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Health Impact:</p> | | X | <p>There are no health impacts arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are accepted by the Executive, this may result in more effective delivery of sports facilities, which would have a knock-on implication for the physical activity levels within the local population.</p> |
| <p>ICT Impact:</p> | | X | <p>There are no ICT impacts arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Digital Services Impact:</p> | | X | <p>There are no impacts for Digital Services arising directly from this report.</p> |
| <p>Council Strategy Priorities:</p> | | X | <p>There are no Council Strategy Priorities arising directly from this report, although if the Task and Finish Group's recommendations are accepted by the Executive, this would have implications for Priority 4: A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire, which includes an action to work with the local sporting community to finalise plans for new Community Sports</p> |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | Stadium at Faraday Road. This would also have implications for Priority 5: Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice, which includes an action around delivery of the updated Playing Pitch Strategy. |
| Core Business: | | X | | Improving project governance is part of the core business of delivering services. |
| Data Impact: | | X | | There are no data impacts associated with this report. |
| Consultation and Engagement: | A full list of stakeholders and expert witnesses consulted is contained in the Task and Finish Group's report. | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report presents the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group set up by the Scrutiny Commission to determine whether there was a strategically and financially sound business case for the 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.
- 4.2 Members of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee are invited to review the recommendations and consider whether these should be put to the Executive for consideration.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.2 At its meeting on 24 September 2024, the Scrutiny Commission agreed the terms of reference and membership for a Task and Finish Group to review the business case for the Monks Lane Sports Hub and the consistency of advice given to Members at Planning Committees where related applications were considered, and at Executive where decisions were made about proceeding with the project. The Task and Finish Group was asked to develop recommendations for lessons learned that could be applied to similar projects in future.
- 5.3 The review focused on six objectives:
- (1) To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money.
 - (2) To determine whether the project would have delivered on the council's strategic objectives.
 - (3) To determine whether the project was well managed.

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- (4) To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.
- (5) To determine whether the council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision.
- (6) To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).

5.4 A copy of the Task and Finish Group's terms of reference is provided as Appendix A.

Background

- 5.5 The Task and Finish Group met four times between November 2024 and February 2025 to hear evidence from witnesses in relation to the review. These included Council officers (including former officers), representatives from relevant external organisations and members of the public who have a long-standing interest in the project.
- 5.6 Members heard evidence from former and current Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Sport and Leisure. Sport England was invited to give evidence, but declined to take part.
- 5.7 Through evaluation of the evidence collected and with technical support from officers, Members have been able to highlight a number of issues and identify where it is considered that potential improvements could be made, or where further work would be beneficial.
- 5.8 Councillor Culver as Chair prepared an initial report, for consideration at the Scrutiny Commission meeting on 13 March 2025. However, Members resolved that:
 - the report should not be discussed at that meeting, and that it should be deferred so further work could be undertaken; and
 - a special meeting of the Scrutiny Commission be arranged to consider the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group report.
- 5.9 A further meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 16 June 2025 in order to hear evidence from Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources) and Sharon Armour (Legal Services Manager). The report was subsequently updated to reflect the additional evidence provided and to respond to feedback received on the initial draft report. It was agreed with the Deputy Monitoring Officer that this should be considered by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee, since the Scrutiny Commission was deleted as part of the changes to the scrutiny structure agreed at the Annual Meeting of Council on 15 May 2025.

6 Proposals

- 6.1 The Task and Finish Group has developed a set of recommendations as set out below. Subject to the approval of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee, these

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recommendations will be referred to Executive for consideration at a later date, accompanied by a management response.

- 6.2 It should be noted that many of the recommendations are related to project management and governance aspects. As such, there may be some overlap with the Project Management Task and Finish Group. It was originally planned that the Project Management Task Group would review three separate projects, but it was agreed that since the Sports Hub had already been reviewed, the Project Management Task and Finish Group's remit could be reduced accordingly.

| Ref | Recommendation | Priority |
|---|--|----------|
| Objective One: To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money | | |
| 1. | Council projects must achieve policy and strategic objectives while maximising value for money. There must be documentation demonstrating that all options have been considered, including cost comparisons. | High |
| 2. | The business case must be maintained throughout the project and reviewed at any major change or stage gate by the project board. | High |
| 3. | Projects must have clear tolerance thresholds, including budget and timescale. | High |
| 4. | Hours spent on capital projects by 'business as usual' staff must be recorded and allocated against the correct capital project code. Each project should have a 'partner' in the finance team to help the project manager ensure they are recording this information correctly. | Medium |
| 5. | The council should be fully transparent about its rationale for major decisions that involve large amounts of public money, and in particular its reasons for not following the advice of experts it has commissioned. | High |
| 6. | The Council should have the courage to abandon a project if it is apparent that more cost-effective options are available. | High |
| 7. | When members of the public or community groups present a serious alternative project (having a business plan backed by Sport England and receiving planning permission is an indicator of seriousness), the Council should consider whether this alternative fulfils the strategic need identified by the Council and whether it represents value for money. The relevant portfolio holder should respond formally to the alternative project proposal, in the interests of transparency and accountability. | High |
| 8. | If the Council enters a partnership with a private entity, the Rugby Club in this case, it must be able to justify that it meets strategic need and is value for money compared with other options. Taxpayers' money must not be used to subsidise private entities when the funds could be spent more effectively elsewhere. | High |

| | | |
|---|---|--------|
| Objective Two: To determine whether the project would have delivered on the Council's strategic objectives | | |
| 9. | Executive should ensure that Council projects meet objectives laid out in strategic documents. If it becomes apparent that strategic objectives cannot be met by the options available to the Council, this should be explained to the public in the interests of accountability and transparency, and strategies and business cases refreshed accordingly. | High |
| 10. | The new Playing Pitch Strategy should look at all options including agricultural land and the North-East Thatcham area where large scale development is planned. If members ask in future what options have been considered, there should be documentary proof including cost comparisons. | High |
| 11. | Stage E Reviews of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be undertaken with governing bodies including Berks and Bucks FA, 'to ensure delivery against the recommendations and action plan and ensure that it is kept robust and up to date' as the Sport England Playing pitch Strategy guidance recommends, so that information is no more than two years' old. Any material changes must be captured. | Low |
| 12. | The council must fully engage with stakeholders on projects of this scale. This should include a full public consultation. Town and parish councils, when a scheme affects their area, should be consulted. | High |
| Objective Three: To determine whether the project was well managed | | |
| 13. | All Council ventures from initial inception through to delivery and closure should be run with the most appropriate project management method, with full traceability of Risks, Issues, Actions committed to and undertaken, Dependencies and Decisions made captured. All project board meeting documentation (not just an agenda and action log per meeting) should be retained and decisions captured. All options should be documented by officers, and decisions on those options by councillors and senior management/executive should also be documented. This aids sound and transparent decision making, and auditability. It also protects the reputation of the Council. | High |
| 14. | Project officers must make use of the document templates in the intranet project management toolkit. Any exceptions should be agreed by the project board. | High |
| 15. | The Executive Leadership Team should commit to providing project leaders with the (refresher) training they need to perform their role effectively and monitor its use and effectiveness. | Medium |
| 16. | Project management records should be kept in good order. If some elements of a project are managed in house, and some by external consultants, there still needs to be a well-ordered archive of documents so that future officers can find the documents. Project management documentation should be shared on a | High |

Sports Hub Task & Finish Group Report

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| | continuous basis and kept in a single repository for aid of audit. The Council might choose to outsource project management but should not outsource project governance. | |
| 17. | Senior managers and Executive members overseeing major projects should be able to articulate the objectives clearly and know where the relevant documents are. | High |
| 18. | All projects need to have a project closure report. | High |
| 19. | The findings and recommendations of this Sports Hub task and finish group and the LRIE task and finish group of 2020 must be shared with the chairman of the project management task and finish group, so that the learnings can be considered when they examine other Council projects. They are due to begin their work after the Sports Hub task and finish group completes its work. | High |
| 20. | The final copy of the task and finish group report (this document) should be logged in a central repository along with the other documentation collated by WBC Programme Management Office (PMO) for the Sports Hub Project. | Medium |
| <p>Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles</p> | | |
| 21. | Consistent, evidence-based advice must be given to members of planning committees. The legal team should check all planning reports where the Council is the applicant. Members of District Planning Committee should not be given advice that is contradictory to what was previously presented to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee. If the Council decides that its advice to a committee was incorrect or misleading it should be transparent about this and re-present the application to Western or Eastern Area Planning Committee using correct and clear advice. | High |
| 22. | When members of Corporate Board are aware of contradictory and confusing advice relating to council applications and Executive papers, they must ensure members and the public receive clear communication. | High |
| 23. | When the Council is the planning applicant and/or the project concerned is being promoted by the Executive, members of the Executive should not vote on that application at planning committee meetings. They should either be substituted for that meeting or, if present, they should declare that they are predetermined and take no part in the debate or vote while the application is being considered. This is essential to retain the trust of the public in the planning decision making process. This should be added to the Constitution. | High |
| 24. | Complete records of FOI requests must be kept, including reasons for responses to requests. This will allow audit to understand why certain documents may or may not have been released. | High |
| 25. | The Council must refer itself to the Local Government Ombudsman and ask them to consider the contents of this report. | High |

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| Objective five: To determine whether the Council’s decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision | | |
| 26. | The Sports Hub project should have been promptly closed after the Executive decided they were not going to proceed with it, and all project accounts completed. | Medium |
| 27. | A project like the Faraday Road refurbishment project start with a new baseline, be a distinct project, and had its own budget line. | Medium |
| Objective six: To establish whether the Council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward) | | |
| n/a | There were no recommendations arising. | |

7 Other options considered

The Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee may choose to accept the Task and Finish Group’s recommendations in full or in part, or amend the recommendations before putting them to the Executive. Alternatively, the Committee may choose not to put any of the report’s recommendations to the Executive if it considers that they are not appropriate.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The proposals outlined in Section 6 above have been agreed by the Task and Finish Group, based on the evidence presented. It is considered that these could be applied to similar projects in future.
- 8.2 While some of these proposals could be actioned relatively quickly, at minimal cost and with existing resources, it is recognised that others may have financial and resource implications.

9 Appendices

Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference

Appendix B – Task and Finish Group Report (Part II)

Background Papers:

None

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 associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All wards

Officer details:

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Document Control

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Appendix A

Overview and Scrutiny Review Matrix

Review Topic: Sports Hub

Timescale

Start: October 2024

Finish: January 2025

Review Rationale:

To determine whether there was a strategically and financially sound business case for the Sports Hub, and whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.

Terms of Reference:

To determine whether the Sports Hub project was value for money.

To determine whether the project would have delivered on the council's strategic objectives.

To determine whether the project was well managed.

To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles.

To determine whether the council's decision to abandon the project in its original form was a strategically and financially sound decision.

To establish whether the council intends to deliver any elements of the original project at Monks Lane (bearing in mind planning permission remains and project funds are being carried forward).

To determine what lessons can be learned from this project.

Review Membership:

Councillor Carlyne Culver
Councillor Jeremy Cottam
Councillor Paul Dick
Councillor David Marsh
Councillor Chris Read

Chairman: Councillor Carlyne Culver

Scrutiny Officer: Gordon Oliver

Information Required

Documents/Evidence:

Sports Hub business case and all associated costs
Playing Pitch Strategy including Stage E Review 2022 and documentation relating to the planned 2024 review
Sports Hub planning application and associated papers

Sports Hub Task & Finish Group Report

Western Area Planning Committee agenda pack (15 December 2021)
Executive decision 4149 (16 December 2021)
District Planning Committee agenda pack (2 March 2022)
WBC 'Defendant's Detailed Grounds of Resistance' presented to the High Court (22 September 2022)
Executive decision 4332 (23 March 2023)
LRIE task and finish group final report presented to OSMC (as Scrutiny Commission was formerly known) on 28 July 2020

Witnesses:

Internal

Councillor Howard Woollaston, former Executive Member for Housing, Leisure, Culture and Sport
Councillor Nigel Foot, current Executive Member for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside
Shannon Colman-Slaughter, Service Director – Finance and Property
April Peberdy, Service Director - Communities
Sarah Clarke, Solicitor – Service Director, Strategy & Governance
Masie Masiwa, Senior Planning Officer, Development & Regulation
Simon Till, Team Leader (Development Control), Development & Regulation

External

Sport England
Newbury Community Football Group
Alan Pearce
Paul Morgan
Newbury Rugby Club
Lynne Doherty, former Leader of WBC
Consultants who worked on the project who have since left WBC – acknowledging that they would not be obliged to attend to give evidence

Measures Available

Desired Outcomes:

To meet the objectives outlined in the terms of reference and produce a document of findings for Scrutiny Commission.

Executive – 18 December 2025

Item 11 – Member Questions

To follow

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