

DRAFT

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

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Tony Vickers (Chairman), Stephanie Steevenson (Vice-Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Nick Carter, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Carlyne Culver, Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Tom McCann, Biyi Oloko, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place) Martyn Sargeant (Service Director – Strategy and Governance), Nicola Thomas (Deputy Monitoring Officer and Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services), Melanie Booth (Group Executive – Liberal Democrats), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive – Conservatives), Stephen Chard (Clerk and Democratic Services Manager), Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, and Honorary Alderman Graham Pask

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Martin Colston, Councillor Heather Codling, Councillor Patrick Clark, Councillor Jane Langford, Councillor Dennis Benneyworth, Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Erik Pattenden, Councillor Janine Lewis (Attending Online), Councillor Matt Shakespeare, Councillor Geoff Mayes (Attending Online), Councillor Ross Mackinnon (Attending Online), Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Anthony Stansfield, Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles, Honorary Alderman Mollie Lock, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, and Honorary Alderman Rick Jones

PART I

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman reported that he had attended 15 events since the last Council meeting on 16 October 2025. Specifically, he highlighted his attendance at the Streatley ribbon cutting for a new accessible footpath, an 80th anniversary celebration for the founding of the United Nations, the Greenham Trust Charity Award Ceremony, and the 20th annual road death memorial service put on by Thames Valley Police. In addition, he also attended a number of remembrance events, including a Poppy Appeal in Calcot and the Great Western Railway Poppies to Paddington event.

The Vice-Chairman also attended a number of events since the last ordinary Council meeting, including a Diwali celebration in Thatcham, an achievement event for children in care, Glow Rides – and event for all women cycling, the Thatcham remembrance service, and the Purley-on-Thames' annual Chairman's reception.

2. Minutes

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

“That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.”

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

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3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4. **Petitions**

Councillor Carolyne Culver presented a petition containing 53 online signatures, and 15 paper signatures, relating to the Berkshire Pension Fund divesting from companies complicit in Israel's genocide and apartheid.

The Chairman of West Ilsley Parish Council, Tim Pearey, presented a petition containing 70 online signatures, and 76 paper signatures, relating to the implementation of a weight restriction on Bury Lane, West Ilsley.

The Chairman thanked the Member and resident for presenting the petitions and confirmed that officers would review them and confirm within ten working days what action would be taken.

5. **Public Questions**

Details of the public and Member question and answer sessions are available from the following link: [Q&As](#).

6. **Membership of Committees**

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Dominic Boeck and seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery:

That Council approve the following changes to the membership of Committees:

- "That Charlie Gale and Natasha Rowe be appointed as Young Person Co-opted Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
- That Emily Daly be appointed as Primary School Governor Co-opted Member of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee"

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

Council noted that Councillor Janine Lewis and Councillor Billy Drummond would swap positions on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee so that Councillor Drummond becomes a full Member of the Committee and Councillor Lewis becomes a substitute Member of the Committee.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, also highlighted several changes to the portfolios of the Executive Members. Therefore, the composition of the Executive for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year was announced as:

Councillor Jeff Brooks	–	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation, ICT, Customer Services and the Project Management Office
Councillor Heather Codling	–	Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Education and Children and Family Services
Councillor Patrick Clark	–	Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Councillor Iain Cottingham	–	Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources
Councillor Nigel Foot		Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure,

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		Sport and Countryside
Councillor Denise Gaines	–	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing
Councillor Stuart Gourley	–	Portfolio Holder for Highways and Environment
Councillor Tom McCann	–	Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment)
Councillor Justin Pemberton	–	Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
Councillor Vicky Poole	–	Portfolio Holder for Strategy, Governance and Commercialisation

7. **Motions from Previous Meetings**

There were no motions from previous meetings needing updates.

8. **Updates from Committees**

Council noted the meetings that had been held since the last ordinary meeting of Council as laid out in Agenda Item 9.

9. **Devolution - Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority Expression of Interest (C4747)**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning the submission of an expression of interest in a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Justin Pemberton and seconded by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

That the Council:

1. “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. Notes that the informal Devolution Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.
3. Recommends that the Executive approves the Expression of Interest (EOI) to authorise the Council to submit this 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.
4. Supports that a further report will be brought to Council and Executive prior to any final decision on the creation of a Strategic Authority”.

Councillor Pemberton introduced the report and highlighted that the White Paper from Government discussed both Local Government Reorganisation – of which the Council had submitted a Ridgeway Council proposal – as well as devolution. The Government was clear that it wanted all of England to be covered by a devolved authority and that they would be ending the current deals-based approach to devolution. He also informed Council that the Government would pass legislation enabling them to create a devolved authority above any local authority which failed to come to an agreement about one. For

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this reason, doing nothing could mean the Government legislating the creation of a Strategic Authority over West Berkshire, without its input.

Members noted that the goals of these Strategic Authorities would be to enable growth and that their remit devolved from central Government would involve cross boundary infrastructure, spatial planning, developing local skills, and encouraging investment. If the Government were to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) in the Thames Valley, it would likely have a directly elected Mayor and a board comprised of the Leaders of the Councils in the area. However, specific governance arrangements would be confirmed in any final proposal. In addition, the Government would benefit from dealing with a reasonable number of Mayors across England, rather than hundreds of Council Leaders. Overall, Councillor Pemberton recommended that the Council submit an expression of interest in a Thames Valley MSA.

Some Members expressed their opposition to the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority. As Police and Crime Commissioner and Local Elections had low voter turnout, questions were raised as to the democratic legitimacy of a future Mayor. In addition, the centralisation of power in the hands of a single mayor, and the undermining of the role of local authorities with decisions being taken further away from where residents lived, was also a concern. As there was no confirmation about the governance structure or funding proposed for the MSA at this time, it was questioned as to whether the Council should engage in the proposed process.

Council also questioned the geographical area that would be covered by a Thames Valley MSA, and if Swindon and Buckinghamshire would be included, as this was not mentioned in the report. However, as this process was still in its initial stages, Council noted that the geography had not been confirmed. Some Members also wanted greater clarity as to what benefits the MSA could bring to the area, such as promoting the wellbeing of children and young people and how it could better serve the rural communities in the district.

Overall, as Council believed that the creation of a MSA over West Berkshire was inevitable, they agreed to approve that the Executive submit the Expression of Interest and engage in the process in order to shape any MSA for the benefit of the local residents.

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

10. **Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement (C4760)**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 11) concerning the shared service agreement for the Public Protection Partnership (PPP).

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tom McCann and seconded by Councillor Justin Pemberton:

That the Council is informed that:

1. "The decision taken by the Executive to enter into a new shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31 March 2029 including the terms set out in this report and to extend the delegation of the Executive functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee.
2. 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.
3. West Berkshire Council continues to be the host authority to avoid significant short-term disruption.

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4. 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 on behalf of West Berkshire Council”.

And that the Council approves:

- A) “The extension of the delegation of its Council public protection related functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee until the 31 March 2029.
- B) That 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.
- C) And 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 the recommendation above”.

Councillor McCann introduced the report and highlighted that he was very satisfied that Councillor Pemberton, the previous Portfolio Holder for the area, and Officers, had managed to successfully re-incorporate Wokingham Borough Council into the PPP. As he believed that Wokingham would be a positive addition to the PPP, he encouraged Council to approve the recommendations.

In addition, Councillor McCann indicated that he would clarify the financial implications of the report as some Members raised questions about the costs associated with the change proposed. The potential impact of the PPP on the wellbeing of children was also raised as an area that Members would also like to see more detail on.

The work of the PPP was mentioned, with several Members highlighting their positive experience in engaging with the service on the wide range of activities that they undertook. However, some Members indicated that they would appreciate greater clarity about how to contact the service about the local issues that they were facing.

Overall, as Council were happy for Wokingham to rejoin the PPP, and that they were satisfied that they would be a positive addition to the joint service, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

11. **Constitution changes to Part 8: Contract Rules and Part 13: Appendix D (C4748)**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 12) concerning Constitutional changes to Part 8 – Contract Rules – and Part 13 – Appendix D.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Iain Cottingham:

That Council approve the amendment of the following parts of the Constitution as outlined in the report:

- A) “Part 8 Contract Rules, to take effect on 1 April 2026.
- B) Part 13 Appendix D, Protocol for use of ICT Equipment supplied to Members, to take immediate effect”.

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the Constitution was a living document and under continual review. The Procurement Act of 2023 required the Council to examine its procurement rules. The proposed changes in the report complied with this demand and also streamlined them in order to ensure that they were more usable. He

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gave assurances about the effectiveness of the Council's checks and balances, even with a greater delegation value, and noted that the proposal had been recommended for approval by both the Constitution Review Task Group and the Governance Committee.

On a question about the approval process when spending anything worth £2.5m and above, Members noted that spending of this amount was required to be progressed through the Procurement Board of the Council (of which the Portfolio Holder was a Member), that it would need to be publicly declared before it could be spent, and that the full details of the decision would be made publicly available.

In response to a question about the potential risk of a large project getting split into smaller parts so it could pass under delegated powers, Members were assured that, as this was a well-known risk from a fraud perspective, it would be tightly monitored to ensure this did not occur. If it was found that this had occurred, the repercussions would be very serious.

Overall, as Council were satisfied that the proposed new thresholds would be in line with the statutory position, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

12. **2026/27 West Berkshire Council Timetable of Public Meetings (C4753)**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 13) concerning the timetable of public meetings for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Iain Cottingham:

"That Council approve the timetable of public meetings for the 2026/27 Municipal Year".

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that it was a regular item which outlined the proposed meeting dates for West Berkshire Council for the upcoming municipal year. Overall, as Council was satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the meeting timetable.

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

13. **Notices of Motion**

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (of which Agenda Item 14 refers) submitted in the name of Councillor David Marsh relating to the use of Swift Bricks.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor David Marsh and seconded by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

"That Council notes that swifts, one of the oldest species on earth, fly thousands of miles (spending up to three years on the wing) to breed in the UK. Increasingly, they are finding their nesting sites blocked up. Their ancient forests with nest hollows now gone, they rely on cavities in buildings, but these too are disappearing, leaving this iconic creature on the RSPB "red list" of endangered species.

Swifts just need a brick with a hole in it to nest. The average two-storey new house contains 20,000 bricks and swift bricks— costing an estimated £30 each – can help save swifts, as well as other small nesting birds. The Labour government, having promised in opposition to incorporate a swift brick nest box into new buildings by law, has reneged on this pledge.

Council further notes, however, that a number of local authorities, with all-party support, have adopted policies requiring swift bricks to be included in new

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developments. These measures have proved popular with residents as well as local wildlife charities.

Council therefore resolves that:

- A) Swift boxes will be installed at suitable Council-owned properties, including providing audio lures to attract breeding pairs, before the next nesting season in May 2026.*
- B) At least 50% of homes on new developments in West Berkshire shall be required to have at least two swift bricks installed. New commercial and industrial developments shall be required to have at least three swift bricks installed per appropriate unit.*
- C) This condition will be attached to all relevant planning permissions for new buildings, in line with Local Plan policy SP11, Biodiversity and Geodiversity, the Council's Environment Strategy (refreshed May 2025), the Berkshire Biodiversity Strategy, and other initiatives to maintain, restore and increase biodiversity in West Berkshire.*
- D) This is in addition to any biodiversity mitigation or enhancements normally requested through the planning process.”*

The Chairman informed the Council that the Motion would not be debated at this meeting. In accordance with [Procedure Rule 12.6.2](#), the Motion would be referred to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee. This would enable their input and that of expert Officers, before then coming back to Council for debate.

Councillor Marsh introduced the Motion and highlighted that swifts were one of the oldest species on Earth. The proposed Motion would seek to ensure that a proportion of new homes built in the district would contain swift bricks in order to help preserve the species. Since 1995, there had been a decline in the species by two thirds, with 40 per cent of this decline occurring in last ten years. In addition, swifts were now on the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds red list of threatened species.

Local Councils around the country had taken measures around swifts, including a Council in Nottinghamshire which passed a motion similar to the one proposed, ensuring half of new homes included swift bricks, as well as Devon County Council who installed swift bricks on County Hall. These bricks could halt the decline in swifts and provide a safe nesting place for many other types of small birds. In addition, the adoption of this Policy would also offer developers a visible way to ensure that promises to protect and enhance the natural environment were being taken seriously.

Councillor Denise Gaines, the relevant Portfolio Holder, responded that the decline in the swift population was a real concern, and that Government looked to have u-turned around the inclusion of swift protections in their Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

She also noted that Local Plan Policy SP11, on conservation and enhancement of the environment, outlined that the Council would like to create habitats for locally characteristic species within the fabric of buildings, and enhance wildlife connectivity general.

As a recent development in the district was approved with a condition for the inclusion of swift bricks, Councillor Gaines welcomed the Motion being discussed by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.

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14. Members' Questions

Details of the public and Member question and answer sessions are available from the following link: [Q&As](#).

(The meeting commenced at 7pm and closed at 8.50pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature