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

ANNUAL COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 14 MAY 2026

Councillors Present: Tony Vickers (Chairman), Stephanie Steevenson (Vice-Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Billy Drummond, Nick Carter, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Laura Coyle, Carlyne Culver, Paul Dick, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander, Janine Lewis, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Tom McCann, Biyi Oloko, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Richard Somner, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Monitoring Officer and Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Ashley Milum (Service Director – Education), Martyn Sargeant (Service Director for Strategy & Governance), Melanie Booth (Group Executive – Liberal Democrats), Jake Carpenter (Group Executive – Conservatives), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Honorary Alderman Adrian Edwards, and Honorary Alderman Tony Linden

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Iain Cottingham, Councillor Martin Colston, Councillor Erik Pattenden, Councillor Joanne Stewart, Councillor Matt Shakespeare, Councillor Jane Langford, Councillor Jeremy Cottam, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Anthony Stansfeld, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderman Alan Law, Honorary Alderman Gordon Lundie

PART I

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman reflected on his year in office, indicating that he had attended 118 engagements during his term. The Chairman indicated that he had been made very aware of the role that voluntary sector partners and communities played in the delivery of both necessary services, and those which should be provided if resources were available. He thanked them all for their fantastic work.

The Chairman also spoke to his theme for the year, 'faith in our future', and his Chairty, 'Good Hope Farm'. He indicated that over £350 had been raised by the Council for the charity (which was then doubled by the Good Exchange). This would go to help them continue to provide healthy outdoor and productive contact with nature as well as the growing of food and flowers. This would all be done with the help of individuals with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

He also drew Members attention to the ecological emergency and emphasised the need to take action locally, not just nationally. He also encouraged Members to attend their local 'Peoples Emergency Briefings'.

The Vice-Chairman also spoke about her year in office and her attendance at several events since the last ordinary Council meeting. Some of these included the swearing in of the new High Sheriff for Berkshire, Lieutenant Colonel Renu Raksha Wing Kapur MBE, and the Newbury Mayor Making Ceremony. She concluded by thanking Members for

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providing her the opportunity to serve as Vice-Chairman as well as the Chairman himself, for his diligent work during 2025/26 and setting a fantastic example for future Chair's.

2. Presentations

The Chairman made presentations to Councillor Martha Vickers, the Chairman's Consort for the 2025/26 Municipal Year, to thank her for all the support that she provided him during his time in office.

The Chairman also extended his heartfelt thanks to members of the Democratic Services team for their support, specifically highlighting the contribution of Gabriel Hood, a T-Level work placement student.

3. Election of the Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027

Council considered the election of Chairman of West Berkshire Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27. Councillor Owen Jeffery nominated Councillor Stephanie Steevenson to the position of Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines. There were no further nominations received.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Owen Jeffery and seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines:

"That Councillor Stephanie Steevenson be elected as Chairman of West Berkshire Council for the 2026/27 Municipal Year."

The proposer and seconder spoke in support of their nomination. Councillor Jeffery assured Members that Councillor Steevenson was not afraid to get fully engaged with all aspects of Council work, approaching it with professionalism, care, and a keen sense of what was proper and correct. He also welcomed the opportunity to nominate Councillor Steevenson as he had originally encouraged her to run for a position on Thatcham Town Council. As she was dedicated, serious, professional, and skilful, he was honoured to be able to propose her to be the Chairman of Council.

In addition, Councillor Gaines highlighted that she had known Councillor Steevenson for years as both a friend and colleague. She noted her exemplary work as both Vice-Chairman and also as the Council's Armed Forces Champion. For these reasons, Councillor Gaines was happy to second the nomination for Councillor Steevenson to be Chairman of Council.

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

Councillor Steevenson (The Chairman) read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Chairman thanked all Members for their support and declared that it was an honour to be elected to the position. She also thanked her proposer and seconder for their kind words.

The Chairman outlined her theme for the year, 'Uniformed Youth', and highlighted her chosen groups that she wanted to support, Girlguiding Royal Berkshire (Valley Division) and the Royal Berkshire Army Cadet Force.

4. Election of the Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2026/2027

Council considered the election of Vice-Chairman of West Berkshire Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27. Councillor Heather Codling nominated Councillor Martha Vickers to the position of Vice-Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery. There were no further nominations received.

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MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Heather Codling and seconded by Councillor Owen Jeffery:

“That Councillor Martha Vickers be elected as Vice-Chairman of West Berkshire Council for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.”

The proposer and seconder spoke in support of their nomination. Councillor Codling informed Council that she had known Councillor Vickers since she was elected to Newbury District Council in 1991. She described Councillor Vickers’ background, her career as a health visitor, how she founded a youth council, and her passions for housing, health and wellbeing, and the environment and climate change. Overall, Councillor Codling believed that Councillor Vickers would be an excellent Vice-Chairman and provide invaluable support to the Chairman.

In seconding this nomination, Councillor Owen Jeffery highlighted that he was delighted to nominate his second female candidate for the evening, and that he believed this would be the first time both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would be women. He also expressed his support for Councillor Vickers and agreed that she would provide excellent support to the Chairman

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

Councillor Martha Vickers (The Vice-Chairman) read and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office. The Vice-Chairman thanked all Members for their support.

5. Minutes

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Stephanie Steevenson and seconded by Councillor Billy Drummond:

“That the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting held on 26 March 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.”

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

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Stephanie Steevenson and seconded by Councillor Heather Codling:

“That the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 26 March 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.”

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

6. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Howard Woollaston declared an interest in Agenda Item 16, the Lambourne Neighbourhood Development Plan, as he was the Ward Member for Lambourne. However, as this was not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the item.

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.

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9. **Appointment of the Executive by the Leader of the Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, highlighted that the Executive would remain the same as it was at the end of 2025/26.

The only change would be the addition of a responsibility to the Portfolio of Councillor Vicky Poole, who would now be the Council's disabled community liaison. She would be the point of contact for disabled residents and interest groups and ensure that they were better represented on the Council. The Leader thanked all the Executive Members for their continued work.

Therefore, the composition of the Executive for the Municipal Year 2026/27 was announced to be as follows:

Councillor Jeff Brooks	–	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme
Councillor Heather Codling	–	Deputy Leader of Council and Portfolio Holder for 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, Sport and Countryside
Councillor Denise Gaines	–	Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing
Councillor Stuart Gourley	–	Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways
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 and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison

10. **Leader of the Council's Annual Report**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jeff Brooks, made his Annual Report to Council. Some of the highlights from the report included that the Council was one of only three to achieve a Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment of 'Good' for its Adult Social Care and Children and Family Services departments, and he thanked all the staff involved for achieving this. In addition, it was noted that 95 per cent of West Berkshire maintained schools had been rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). The Council had also been given a green rating across all of its highway's categories by the Government, one of the 16 out of over 170 authorities to do so. Councillor Brooks also indicated that a new highways improvement group would be established so that it could consider any highways related requests from residents.

Members noted that the Administration was continuing its commitment to make West Berkshire greener. Some of the policies behind this involved increasing the amount of

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recycling streams available to residents to seven and installing decarbonisation projects. In addition, recycling rates had risen from 49.8 per cent in 2023/24, to 55 per cent in 2025/26. On health and physical activity, West Berkshire residents were considered to be some of the healthiest and most physically active in the country, with rates of usage of the Council's leisure centres having risen by 18 per cent.

Shaw House had also been enhanced. The spending that had been done to make it more of an attraction was enabling more residents to enjoy the facility whilst also ensuring that it covered more of its own costs. Similar opportunities, such as had been done at Shaw House, would also be examined in the future.

In terms of housing, Council was informed that a former care home in the west of the District and a property in Thatcham were both planned to be turned into temporary accommodation, with the goal that as few families as possible would be forced to stay in bed and breakfast accommodation. Furthermore, it was noted that no children had been staying in temporary accommodation for longer than six weeks. On affordable homes, 578 had been delivered since the Administration was formed in 2023/24, which was over half of their target for the entire period to 2030.

The Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) had also been rolled out and was putting money in families' pockets. This tool was estimated to have helped 11,000 residents get the benefits that they had been entitled to but were not claiming. On children and young people, Members noted that the Council would be partnering with Berkshire Youth to introduce a Youth Council and hold forums at the Waterside Centre. In addition, art competitions would be run for junior and secondary school students, and the Council would also put on a debating competition.

Despite the Council's finances being under strain, the Leader indicated that wherever possible, positive projects would be funded. He also clarified that he had seen comments being made on the Newbury Peace Garden, but that this had been funded via a grant the Council had secured from Government. Overall, Councillor Brooks highlighted that the Administration would continue to invest and protect vulnerable people in the district as well as improve services in every way possible in the coming year.

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, and the Leader of the Minority Group, Councillor David Marsh, asked questions of the Leader on his annual report.

In response to a point that Councillor Brooks made about 'good' and 'outstanding' ratings for schools, it was highlighted that these metrics were no longer being used. The Leader was asked if that data had just been copied from the previous year's report. As a point of clarification, the Leader indicated that the new system was being implemented, but that this was situation as of the past year. In addition, the Leader was asked about the lack of information provided on the Key Stage 2 attainment for disadvantaged children, and if any progress had been made. Although stating that some progress had been made, Councillor Brooks clarified that there was more to be done in this area and that it was a historic issue for West Berkshire.

A question was raised about a comment the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services, Councillor Heather Codling, had previously made, about an investment of £325,000 into school improvements, and if that was really new money as the Conservative Group could not see an increase in the budget from the previous year. In response, the Leader clarified that the budget had not increased, but that they were looking to do so.

On a question about the cost effectiveness of the outside consultants brought in to help with the Financial Improvement Group, and what work had come out of that group to

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date, Councillor Brooks clarified that it had met twice in about four months and although it was too early to see significant results, progress was being made.

In response to a question by Councillor Mackinnon about whether the pedestrianisation of Newbury Town Centre had been mentioned in the Leaders report, he clarified that it had not. Councillor Mackinnon went on to ask about the reasons why the Executive had changed its mind on pedestrianisation as soon as a week before the Executive meeting, and if it was due to the lack of support from their party. This suggestion was rejected by Councillor Brooks who indicated that the Liberal Democrat party support the decisions that had been made. Councillor Marsh responded to this topic by suggesting that if the Council had been given a chance to debate pedestrianisation, it would have helped to remove the controversy around the decisions.

A question was also raised about the progress of the Grazeley Solar Farm and Councillor Brooks informed Council that a new business case was needed given the situation in the energy markets and the interest rates, but that the Administration was ensuring it was a suitable investment. In addition, when asked about if the Peace Garden had provided value for money, the Leader indicated that he believed that it had, but that more work was needed on its disabled access.

A question was raised about the effectiveness of the Policy Development Groups (PDG) and if they really provided an opportunity for other Members to get involved in designing policies. In response, Councillor Brooks informed Members that both the Viable Villages and Transformation PDGs had been working on policies which would be taken through for consideration and approval. Specifically, the Transformation PDG was helping to contribute to Transformation 2.0 programme which would be presented to the Executive.

Having heard the Annual Report and questions on it from both leaders of the opposition groups, the Chairman called a close to the item.

11. **Formation of an Audit and Risk Committee**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 12) concerning the formation of an Audit and Risk Committee.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Heather Codling:

“That Council:

- Dissolve the existing Governance Committee and form a new Audit and Risk Committee.
- That the new committee should have a politically-balanced membership of seven councillors plus up to two independent members (of the public).
- That the independent members (of the public) should receive an allowance of £2,192 to recognise their technical skills and professional expertise.
- To dissolve the existing Personnel Committee and create a new Personnel and Standards Committee, with oversight for the residual responsibilities of the current Governance Committee and the existing responsibilities of the current Personnel Committee.”

Councillor Brooks introduced the report and highlighted that the adaptation of the Committees was sensible and that the proposals had proceeded through the Governance Committee and Constitution Review Task Group with their support. As Audit and Risk and Personnel and Standards were considered to be appropriately connected, he therefore recommended that the proposals be approval by Council.

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Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

12. **Appointment and Allocation of Seats on Committees for the 2026/27 Municipal Year**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 13) concerning the appointment and allocation of seats on Committee for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Vicky Poole and seconded by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

“That Council:

- Is informed that, under paragraph 8 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, notice has been received that the Members set out in paragraph 5.1 are to be regarded as Members of the Liberal Democrat Group, Conservative Group, and Minority Group respectively.
- Agrees to the appointment of the various Committees and to the number of places on each as set out in Table A, at paragraph 5.5.
- Agrees to the allocation of seats to the Political Groups in accordance with section 15(5) of the Local Government Act 1989 as set out in Table B at paragraph 5.15 of the report.
- Is informed that the number of substitutes on each of the Committees be as set out at paragraph 5.18.
- Is informed that, in respect of the District and Area Planning Committees, the substitute Members are all drawn from Members representing wards within the Committee's area who are not appointed to the Committee. Where substitutes attend the District Planning meeting, they need to be drawn from the same Area Planning meeting as the Member they are substituting for.
- Approves the appointment of Members to the Committees as set out in Appendix A, and the appointments to Task Groups and Panels set out in Appendix B, which are in accordance with the wishes of the Political Groups.
- In accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as amended, agrees that the Council's Policy Framework for 2026/27 be as set out in paragraph 5.23 of this report, and that any necessary amendments be made to the Council's Constitution.
- Is informed that other plans, policies, and strategies requiring approval which are not included in the approved Policy Framework, and which are not otherwise reserved by law to Council, will be the responsibility of the Council's Executive in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000.
- Is informed that Part 2, Paragraph 6.2 of Article 6 of the Constitution will be amended to reflect any changes made to the Executive by the Leader of the Council at the Annual Council meeting.
- Re-appoint three Independent Persons (standards), namely Lindsey Appleton, Mike Wall and Alan Penrith.
- Appoint Simon Carey as an Independent Person (Audit) to focus on the risk and audit functions of the Audit and Risk Committee and up to two non-voting Parish/Town Councillors on the Personnel and Standards Committee.

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- Is informed that the membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board as set out in Appendix C.
- Approve that authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make any changes required to the Constitution as a result of the changes to the number of Members of the Council and following the appointments to Committees.
- Is informed about the Council Bodies Rules as detailed at Part 6 of the Constitution detailed at Appendix E.”

Council noted that some minor changes had been proposed by the Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, to Appendix A to the report – that they proposed that Councillor Ross Mackinnon would be their Member of the Audit and Risk Committee, and that Councillor Biyi Oloko would be their Member on the Personnel and Standards Committee.

The Leader of the Minority Group also raised a point that there was no Member of the Minority Group allocated to Appeals. The Monitoring Officer highlighted that seats were allocated via political proportion, and that, as the appeals panels meet in three Member panels, they would also need to be proportional. Due to the allocations already being set out, the question raised was more substantive than simply moving seats between Committees.

Councillor Poole introduced the report and highlighted that she was satisfied to incorporate the changes proposed by Councillor Mackinnon.

A point was raised about the Eastern Area Planning Committee and that there was no substitute available for the Minority Group Member of the committee. In response, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that an amendment to the Constitution allowing Members of different Groups to substitute for the Minority Group Member would be progressing through the governance process before coming to Council for review and final approval.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

13. **Appointments to Outside Bodies for the 2026/27 Municipal Year**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 14) concerning the appointment of Member to Outside Bodies for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Vicky Poole and seconded by Councillor Heather Codling:

“That Council approve the appointments for the Municipal Year 2026/27, of Member representatives to the following outside bodies:

- Royal Berkshire Fire Authority:
 - Councillor Jeff Brooks
 - Councillor Billy Drummond
 - Councillor Owen Jeffery
 - Councillor Dennis Benneyworth

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- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel:
 - Councillor Stephanie Steevenson
 - Councillor Jeremy Cottam (Alternative Member)
- Local Government Association General Assembly:
 - Councillor Jeff Brooks
 - Councillor Heather Codling
 - Councillor Denise Gaines
 - Councillor Ross Mackinnon.”

Councillor Poole introduced the report and recommended that it be approved by Council.

On a point of clarification, it was noted that the Alternative Member on the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel effectively acted as a substitute, as only one Member is appointed to this outside body from West Berkshire Council.

In addition, Members noted that it was possible that the next Council election could produce several large parties on the Council. Therefore, the Constitution Review Task Group was encouraged to consider how proportional appointments could be made to these outside bodies should there be upwards of four large parties on the Council.

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the appointments.

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

14. **Member Development Programme 2026/27**

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 15) concerning the Member Development Plan for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Vicky Poole and seconded by Councillor Heather Codling:

“That Council:

1. Approve the proposed Member Development Programme for 2026/27.
2. Authorise the Service Lead for Legal & Democratic to regularly review and amend these documents where necessary throughout the Municipal Year to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose.
3. Encourage the Group Leaders to use all reasonable endeavours to secure attendance by Members at all relevant training as detailed within the Programme and to participate in the sessions available on the Members Learning Hub.”

Councillor Poole introduced the report and highlighted that it was an annual plan produced in order to support the professional development of the Members. Additional sessions were planned for 2026/27, some of which would be focused on planning reform and special development. The development of softer skills was also a theme of the Plan, which suggested Member take part in a neurodiversity in the workplace course (delivered through the Council’s Learning Hub) and a handling intimidation and stress management course (provided by the Local Government Association).

Overall, as Council were satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

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15. Lambourn Neighbourhood Development Plan

Council considered a report (Agenda Item 16) concerning the Lambourne Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP).

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Denise Gaines and seconded by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

“That Council:

1. Approves that the submitted Lambourn NDP be subject to a six-week consultation under Regulation 16 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
2. Following the six-week consultation, the Lambourn NDP be sent for independent examination under Regulation 17 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).”

Councillor Gaines introduced the report and highlighted that it presented the steps needed to progress the NDP. If successful, it would become part of the statutory Development Plan, used when determining planning applications.

The Lambourne NDP was started in 2017 and had been supported by the Parish Council. Over those nine years, the Parish and NDP Steering Group involved the community in as many ways as possible at every stage of the process. The proposed submission had been consulted on, and it received 326 representations. The Steering Group believe that it represented the community whilst complimenting the West Berkshire adopted Local Plan. Overall, the NDP would help guide development in Lambourne whilst protecting and preserving the parish and its unique aspects and character.

Lack of affordable housing was a concern in Lambourn, so three sites of approximately 45 dwelling had been identified for development. Councillor Gaines concluded by indicating that if examiner was satisfied with the NDP, it would proceed to local referendum.

Members welcomed the NDP, but wanted assurance that after the Plan was made, that it would actually hold material planning weight in the determination of planning applications. Specific reference was made to Cold Ash where some Members indicated that their NDP had not been followed.

Council also noted the hard work that had been done by the NDP Steering Group, and specific thanks were given to their Chair, Sue Cocker.

Overall, as Council agreed that the plan would protect the village whilst allowing for organic growth, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

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

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 8.40pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature