

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 JULY 2025

Councillors Present: Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Ross Mackinnon (Vice-Chairman), Antony Amirtharaj, Jeremy Cottam, Laura Coyle, Erik Pattenden, Christopher Read, Richard Somner and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Sarah Clarke (Executive Director (Resources)), Gabrielle Mancini (Service Director - Transformation, Customer and ICT), Beatriz Teixeira (Performance Research and Consultation Manager), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director for Finance, Property and Procurement, Section 151 Officer), Councillor Iain Cottingham, Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager) and Sam Chiverton (Apprentice Democratic Services Officer)

PART I

1 Minutes

Councillor Carolyne Culver, in opening the meeting, took the opportunity to welcome new full Members of the Committee and gave thanks to the former Members of this group for all their hard work.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held on 13 March 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment and comment:

Item 67 – Sports Hub Task and Finish Group

Paragraph 6, second sentence

Concerns were also expressed about the process that had been followed by the Task and Finish Group, since they did not believe that a right of reply had not been given to all stakeholders, so natural justice had not been served.

Paragraph 11, second sentence

It was clarified that this sentence: 'They would not have used the word 'libel'.' was a comment made by a Member and this was not a term used within the report.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee held on 15 May 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Actions from previous Minutes

Members reviewed the actions from the previous meetings. The following points were noted:

- **89, 90 and 91 (Libraries Review)** – it was proposed to bring an update on the Library Service to the Committee meeting on 16 September 2025. Councillor Carolyne Culver was liaising with the Portfolio Holder to help understand aspects that could most benefit from scrutiny.
- **116 and 143 (Thames Water and Environment Agency)** – Councillor Culver reported that concerns had been raised by a member of the public with Lee Dillon MP. She would liaise with the resident and Mr Dillon to obtain updates on progress. Councillor Jeremy Cottam queried if the ownership of Thatcham Sewage Works had been confirmed. Stephen Chard to follow up on this point. Councillor Cottam raised

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the importance of the careful management of the sewage works to ensure residents were not impacted. Councillor Chris Read added to this by reporting ongoing issues in Woolhampton with tanker lorries routinely travelling through the village causing damage to the main road.

- **157 (Waste Strategy (litter picking))** – Members highlighted the value that was gained from liaison between town/parish councils and volunteer litter pickers. It was highlighted that a number of parishes held litter picking kits and it was important to share that information with local communities and volunteer groups.
- **163 and 221 (housing matters)** – Councillor Culver had been in contact with the relevant Portfolio Holders to help consider what elements could be progressed by the Scrutiny Committee, avoiding duplication of work by other bodies. This had resulted in social housing being the suggested area of focus. This could cover points including repairs to properties, loss of social housing provision in the area, social housing not being built (or adopted) as part of housing developments, concerns relating to anti-social behaviour and the affordability of social housing.
- **201 (water companies as statutory consultees)** – the letter had been sent by Councillor Stuart Gourley to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government requesting that water companies be made statutory consultees for major planning applications. A response was awaited. This action was therefore closed.
- **229 (safer school streets)** – action closed.
- **230 (Corporate Programme)** – the latest Corporate Programme schedule had been circulated to Members. It was agreed that consideration of the Corporate Programme would become a standing item. It was noted that the schedule had some overdue projects. Councillor Iain Cottingham agreed to provide an update on progress with the corporate landlord model and Councillor Jeff Brooks would be asked to provide an update on progress with iTrent implementation (Phase 2).
- **232 (Waste Management Strategy)** – this would be scheduled for the spring/summer of 2026. This would allow for the examination of the impact of the move to three weekly bin collections and changes to kerbside recycling. There was also the need to analyse performance in response to reports of fly tipping.
- **235 (recommendations tracker)** – a tracker would be created for this Scrutiny Committee and provided with the papers for the September meeting.

Actions:

- **Consideration of the Corporate Programme would become a standing item.**
- **Councillor Iain Cottingham agreed to provide an update on progress with the corporate landlord model.**
- **Councillor Jeff Brooks would be asked to provide an update on progress with iTrent implementation (Phase 2).**

3 Changes to the Scrutiny Structure and the Policy Development Group

Scrutiny Structure

All three of the newly formed Scrutiny Committees had met for the first time.

It was confirmed that paperwork relating to the previous Scrutiny Commission remained available on the website.

Members were directed to scrutiny resources available to access on the intranet.

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As there was no longer an overarching Scrutiny Commission above the three new committees, it was suggested that the Scrutiny Chairs liaise with each other to avoid missing or duplicating work, perhaps by meeting on a quarterly basis.

Policy Development Group (PDG)

The PDG was scheduled to meet for the first time on 2 July 2025.

The need for the PDG and the Scrutiny Committees to be aware of each other's work programmes was reflected in the PDG's Terms of Reference to help ensure efforts were not duplicated.

Action:

- **The PDG work programme would be a standing item for this meeting and it was suggested that the PDG receive the scrutiny work programmes.**

4 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

5 Petitions

There were no petitions received at the meeting.

6 Capital Financing Report Outturn: Financial Year 2024/25

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 7) which presented the provisional capital outturn position for the 2024/25 financial year.

Councillor Iain Cottingham, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, presented the report and in doing so made particular reference to Appendix B to the report (Capital Financing Requirement and Liability Benchmark). The Liability Benchmark graph showed that by 2028/29 there would not be sufficient funds to deliver the Capital Programme. The primary reason for this was the growing pressures associated with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and within it the High Needs Block (HNB) which funded the provision of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) commissioned services. The current statutory override, that allowed for HNB overspends to be held as an unusable reserve on the Council's balance sheet, would be removed in March 2027 at which point the overspend would fall to the Council. By this time the liability, which was projected to be between £31-£37m, would have to be met by Council borrowing.

Councillor Cottingham advised that the provisional outturn was £41.1m against the 2024/25 Capital Programme of £59.2m. It was proposed that the remaining £18.3m would be reprofiled into 2025/26.

Councillor Cottingham explained that the Council undertook long-term and short-term borrowing to fund capital expenditure. Interest rates were closely analysed before any borrowing took place.

A number of points were raised and questions asked during the debate. Summarised as follows:

- Members were concerned at the increased level of borrowing and the repayment of these sums. It was explained that the cost of borrowing was covered within the revenue budget. A repayment schedule was in place and this was based on dates of maturity. The £59.2m capital programme was funded via a combination of short-term and long-term borrowing, and consisted of Council funded expenditure (financed through external borrowing) and externally funded expenditure.

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- Clarification was sought in relation to the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) received from the Government. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Section 151 Officer) explained that there was no additional borrowing for this sum, it was facilitated as an accounting adjustment with the Government enabling funding to move from revenue to capital budgets. There was no specific loan or set interest rate assigned to EFS. Repayment was required over a period of 20 years in accordance with the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP).
- It was clarified that use of the EFS included the delivery of the capital programme, to help meet day to day costs and to refinance existing borrowing.
- Efforts would be made to spend the reprofiled amount of £18.3m in 2025/26, but not all areas were in the Council's control. It was explained that if expenditure was not incurred then the borrowing would not be incurred.
- The Capital Programme contained ambitious plans to help improve the lives of residents but it was not possible to deliver them all within the year defined in the programme. Resource limitations could be a contributing factor.
- The Administration aimed to deliver in excess of 70% of the in-year Capital Programme and Councillor Cottingham advised of work to put in place a more robust process by which to build the Capital Programme. This included a review of the prioritisation process used for the different projects.
- A number of factors contributed to the rising SEND cost, but local authorities had no control over the expenditure. Councillor Cottingham felt this was a factor that Central Government needed to recognise.
- The point was made that the Oxfordshire districts which formed part of the Ridgeway proposal did not deliver Adult and Children's Social Care. Activity was ongoing to collate data to help inform the proposals for local government reorganisation with Oxfordshire. This was needed to provide evidence of financial sustainability.
- Positive feedback was fed through from a resident on improvements made to road surfacing.
- Paragraph 5.5 of the report listed the key projects for 2024/25 and this list included projects up to or below £250k. Councillor Cottingham agreed to provide a full itemised list to aid debate at the Executive.
- Councillor Cottingham also agreed to provide an explanation at the Executive on why the project 'Special Education Mental Health and Autism Spectrum Disorder Resourced Provision' had slipped into the current financial year.
- It was noted that the diagram in paragraph 4.1 of the report needed to be more reader friendly in terms of the different colours used and a tidying of the text.
- The average interest rate on the Council's borrowing was 4%. The borrowing costs were detailed within the Revenue report.
- The increased funding requirement for the Social Care Case Management System was a result of needing to procure additional technical consultancy support to deliver additional requirements of the project. External support was a necessity if this was not held in-house.

Actions:

- **The following additional information would be provided at the Executive on 3 July 2025:**
 - **An itemised list of projects costing up to or below £250k.**
 - **Why the project 'Special Education Mental Health and Autism Spectrum Disorder Resourced Provision' had slipped into the current financial year.**

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7 **2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn**

The Committee considered the provisional revenue outturn for the 2024/25 financial year (Agenda Item 8).

Councillor Iain Cottingham, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources, presented the report which outlined the increasing financial pressures that were felt during 2024/25. This had resulted in the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) being applied for and provisionally approved by Central Government. The allocation of £13m would be fully deployed to mitigate the Council's outturn position and rebuild the Council's General Fund to the minimum balance required to support the 2025/26 Revenue Budget.

Councillor Cottingham provided an update to paragraph 4.1 of the report:

'The provisional outturn position for 2024/25 is £181.2m of net expenditure against a net budget of **£164.6m**.'

He reported that costs had significantly increased in Children's Services and these pressures included:

- An increase in the number of children in social care;
- A rise in unit costs, i.e. care homes;
- Increased costs for home to school transport; and
- Agency costs for the employment of Educational Psychologists.

There was an additional pressure of £654k which was as a result of an adjustment made in the processing of housing benefit payments. Some residents had been overpaid but this was unlikely to be recovered as it concerned vulnerable residents.

(Post meeting note: a statement was subsequently issued by the Council which clarified that there had been no overpayment to residents claiming housing benefit and there was therefore no need for any repayment. There had been no financial cash loss to either residents or the Council. The full statement can be viewed from this link: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/44805/No-taxpayers-public-money-has-been-lost-in-housing-revenue-reconciliation>)

A level of agency/consultancy support had been necessary to cover vacant senior finance roles.

Councillor Cottingham concluded his presentation of the report by reiterating the point made under the capital item about the high costs of SEND provision. It was absolutely the case that the Council wanted the best for all its residents, but these costs were very concerning. Efforts were being made to manage costs, including as part of commissioning, to achieve the best value possible.

A number of points were raised and questions asked during the debate, as follows:

A typographical error was noted in paragraph 1.4 of the report: 'Central Government have provisionally agreed to a maximum EFS package of £13m for financial year 2024/25 (with a further £3m in 2025/26).'

The report made reference to the outturn resulting in negative reserves without the EFS. It was suggested that this was in fact an overspend as opposed to a negative reserve.

A lengthy discussion took place in relation to the loss of £477k of income as a result of the sale of a commercial property, the income from which had been included in the budget. The property disposal occurred at the conclusion of the 2023/24 financial year, but it had not been budgeted for due to uncertainty over the disposal and its timing. The loss of income became apparent when the property was disposed of.

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Members were concerned at the timing of this transaction and whether it would have been more appropriate to consider disposal within 2024/25. The point at which there was knowledge of the disposal was queried. The view was expressed that full consideration needed to be given to the full cost implications of a sale, beyond the capital receipt.

Councillor Cottingham advised that the capital receipt enabled the allocation of transformation funding and the timeframe was therefore preferable. His understanding was that there were no further negative implications beyond the loss of income. Councillor Cottingham highlighted that a reduction in the cost of borrowing was achieved. He also referred Members to paragraph 7.8 of the report which explained the role of the Property Investment Board in considering the balance between a one-off capital receipt that could be utilised in the short-term vs the loss of long-term revenue streams.

Councillor Cottingham held the view that a significant amount of time and resource was invested by Officers and Members in achieving an income benefit of approximately £1m through commercial property investment. Income levels were not guaranteed and not within the Council's control.

Councillor Cottingham confirmed his understanding that it was the intention to sell the Council's commercial properties and a programme of disposal was in place over the next three to four years.

Questions were then asked in reference to the table within paragraph 4.3 of the report. Explanations were requested for the budget variance for the budget lines of Executive Director – Place, Executive Director – Resources and for the Chief Executive. The point was made, in relation to the Executive Director – Resources budget, that the External Audit fee had more than doubled causing a significant pressure.

Overspends were also highlighted against the budgets for Transformation and for Finance, Property and Procurement.

Councillor Cottingham explained that he would endeavour to provide updates on these points at the Executive.

Commissioning in relation to SEND provision was returned to and Councillor Cottingham agreed to provide the invest to save business case to Councillor Antony Amirtharaj to provide a fuller explanation of the work that was involved.

Returning to EFS funding, the £13m was subject to independent external audit before being finalised. A further £3m had been requested for 2025/26 and this was provisionally agreed. The forecast pressures for 2025/26 in terms of Children's Services and Adult Social Care meant it would remain challenging to balance the budget regardless of EFS.

There was scope for capital receipts to be used as transformation funding and Councillor Culver requested that information on the use of this funding form part of the item on Transformation at the next Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2025.

A number of different boards were referenced in paragraph 7.3 of the report that supported the Council's financial governance. Councillor Culver asked for a diagram to be provided to help understand how these groups interlinked. Sarah Clarke commented that with the receipt of EFS, the need to review and enhance financial governance would become increasingly important.

Councillor Cottingham felt that some economies of scale could be achieved from Local Government Reorganisation as well as an increase in resilience. Being part of a larger local authority could benefit contract negotiations and the reduction of unit costs. There were however unknown factors, such as the pressures already referred to within Children's Services which could increase as a result of combining with Oxfordshire districts.

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A concern was raised that future Public Health grant funding could reduce when taking into account the underspends against this funding in previous years and the amount held within the Public Health reserve. Councillor Cottingham acknowledged there was a level of risk on this point. Sarah Clarke explained that efforts were being made to fully utilise this funding in other areas where work linked to health and wellbeing.

Actions:

- **Additional information would be provided at the Executive on 3 July 2025 to explain:**
 - **The budget variance for the budget lines of Executive Director – Place, Executive Director – Resources and for the Chief Executive.**
 - **The overspends against the budgets for Transformation and for Finance, Property and Procurement.**
- **Councillor Iain Cottingham to provide the invest to save business case to Councillor Antony Amirtharaj to provide a fuller explanation of the commissioning work that was involved with procuring SEND provision.**
- **Information was requested on the use of capital receipts for transformation activity as part of the item on Transformation at the next Scrutiny Committee on 16 September 2025.**
- **A diagram to be provided to help understand how financial governance groups interlinked.**

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

8 2024/25 Performance Report Q4

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 9), the purpose of which was to provide assurance that the priority areas in the Council Strategy were being managed effectively and, where performance had fallen below the expected level, present information on the remedial action taken and its impact.

Councillor Iain Cottingham invited questions on the report. A number of points were raised and questions asked during the debate:

- High priority measures were reported as either 'Green' or 'Red' in line with the binary reporting methodology that was used. Committee Members felt there were cases where 'Amber' would be appropriate. High thresholds were in place. Councillor Cottingham explained that the RAG rating methodology had been reviewed and this would likely impact on the Q1 report for 2025/26.
- It was noted that one measure, related to the development of the Newbury Masterplan, was pending confirmation of the target date, and it was therefore felt that if this remained a measure for 2024/25 then it should be reported 'Red' (in line with the binary methodology) or rescheduled into 2025/26.
- The difficulty to track improvements etc between this and the previous report was highlighted. It was also noted that the colours used within the report were not easy to distinguish for all readers. Councillor Cottingham gave thanks for this feedback, agreeing that reports needed to be fully accessible and for the direction of travel to be made clear.
- The number of affordable homes completed and ready for occupation was 185 against the target of 150, but it was queried whether the target should be set higher. Councillor Cottingham explained that some targets would be reset, noting it was important to have stretch targets.

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- It was commented that the report provided useful transparency of measures that had not met their targets to date.
- It was queried whether the aims of the Liberal Democrat Manifesto should be included more fully as targets within these reports. For example, the aim of putting care packages in place as soon as possible and in relation to the fixing of potholes. Councillor Cottingham reported that the Administration remained committed to its Manifesto aims, including those that did not feature as a measure in the Council Strategy.
- The target to commence a trial of extended pedestrianisation hours in Newbury Town Centre was referred to and the results requested from the pre-trial consultation. Councillor Cottingham suggested this was a query to put to the relevant Portfolio Holder at the Executive.
- It was felt that Appendix B, which listed business as usual measures reporting as 'Green', could be improved by describing reasons for achieving a measure as this could help to identify lessons learnt. Councillor Cottingham agreed, stating that it was important to celebrate successes and give credit to officers for their hard work.
- Members raised concern at the average number of working days used for sickness absence and the reasons for this absence which included stress, depression and mental health. Sarah Clarke informed Members that the Council had a number of measures in place to support staff such as trained Mental Health First Aiders and by making referrals to Occupational Health. The Council also had Employee Wellbeing Officers. A more detailed report on this matter would be debated at the forthcoming Personnel Committee and further initiatives to support staff were being considered by Corporate Board.

In concluding the item, Councillor Carolyn Culver summarised the following points for future reports:

- The need to establish continuity in presenting the report, making it easier to establish the direction of travel from quarter to quarter.
- The use of arrows to indicate whether performance was improving or not and considering the most appropriate use of colour for the benefit of all readers.
- To more fully reflect upon positive performance and the lessons that could be learnt from that.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9 Annual Scrutiny Report 2024/25

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 10) which provided a summary of the work conducted by the Scrutiny Commission and Health Scrutiny Committee, as well as that of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2024/25.

Councillor Carolyn Culver gave thanks to Gordon Oliver and Vicky Phoenix for their work in supporting scrutiny and for producing this well written report.

RESOLVED that the Annual Scrutiny Report 2024/25 would be presented to Council.

10 Task and Finish Group Updates

Councillor Richard Somner made a general point that it would be useful for a brief overview of activity to be provided with the agenda papers for this standing item.

Action:

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- A brief overview of activity would be provided with the agenda papers to provide an update on progress with task and finish groups.

Project Management

Councillor Chris Read reported that the introductory meeting had taken place and further dates were being organised. Useful feedback had been received from Kent County Council in relation to their project work.

Councillor Carolyne Culver suggested the task group would benefit from considering a best practice project undertaken by the Council.

Sports Hub

Councillor Culver provided the following statement to the Committee:

The task and finish group completed its report in the first week of February 2025 and Corporate Board, on 18 February, concluded that it had concerns with the report. Councillor Culver met senior managers on 3 March to seek feedback about their concerns and on 13 March the Scrutiny Commission voted to do more work on the report.

On 3 April, Councillor Culver met with senior management and Councillor Jeff Brooks. Since that time the task and finish group had met on two further occasions. Once to ensure everything that had happened since the Corporate Board meeting was captured in writing and a second time to formally seek evidence from two additional officers. The minutes of the first meeting were approved, and Member comments on the minutes of the second meeting were currently with the clerk.

The current position was as follows:

- 1.) The task group was waiting for suggested redactions from the legal team. This would mean some elements of the report would not be discussed in public at a scrutiny meeting. Councillor Culver was eager for this to be done as in the meanwhile all the important recommendations, including project management and PPS, were 'gathering dust'.
- 2.) The Monitoring Officer had asked for written evidence that the rugby club witness was content that the report be published. Several weeks ago, the witness informed one of the task group Members that they had no problems with the report and the information about their financial history was already in the public domain. However, the task group had been informed that this must be in writing. Councillor Culver reported that this was the fourth task and finish group she had been involved in, and the first where it had been necessary to ask witnesses for their written approval ahead of publication. A written response was awaited from that witness, but they were not obliged to respond.
- 3.) The task group was waiting on evidence to back up claims made in the recent session.

Councillor Culver concluded by stating her view that guidance for task and finish groups needed to be clearer, and supported this by stating the following:

- The task group was told that the report was too long, but Councillor Culver noted that it was shorter than the LRIE task and finish report.
- The task group was told it had too many recommendations, but it had less than the customer services task and finish report.

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- The task group was given contradictory advice about the acceptability of councillors being involved in the drafting of the report. It had been clarified that councillors could draft task and finish reports.

Councillor Culver highlighted that this needed to be resolved. In the absence of an overarching Scrutiny Commission, the three chairmen of the scrutiny committees would need to liaise with officers to ensure any new guidance was applicable to all three committees. Otherwise, there was the risk of this situation happening again.

At the last task group meeting, Members agreed to refer the report to the Local Government Ombudsman. This action would be taken regardless of whether the report would ever come before this Committee.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon voiced his concern that this statement did not provide a balanced view of the situation with the work of this task group with no comments provided from any other parties on the work.

In response, Councillor Culver suggested that other Members of the task group could be approached for comment and officers could give their view if they wished.

Councillor Mackinnon voiced concern that it would be constitutionally inappropriate for some officers to give a view in public and asked for facilitation of private conversations external to this meeting. Councillor Culver agreed to this.

Councillor Richard Somner suggested there was scope for the Committee to review a redacted version of the task group's report in Part I, with the full report in Part II.

Councillor Culver emphasised the need for clarity on what a task and finish group could do, how membership was selected, and so on, to ensure that it was transparent to Members and the public what the parameters were and proposed that the three scrutiny chairmen and Democratic Services work on this together.

Action:

- **The three scrutiny chairmen and Democratic Services to carry out a piece of work to achieve clarity about the purpose and parameters of task and finish groups.**

11 Appointment of Task and Finish Groups

This item was not discussed as there were no terms of reference to approve, and no changes were proposed to the membership of existing task and finish groups.

12 Executive Forward Plan May to August 2025

The following points were noted from the Council's Forward Plan:

- The final document in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (Ridgeway Council Formal Proposal) was scheduled to be considered by Council on 16 October 2025, who would then make a recommendation to the Executive to help inform their decision on the item at the Executive on 6 November 2025. It was proposed that an outline report be provided to this Committee at its meeting on 16 September 2025. However, as the agenda for the 16 September was lengthy, it was suggested by Councillor Culver that a special meeting could be held on this matter.

Councillor Carolyne Culver fed back from her recent attendance at a Centre for Governance and Scrutiny webinar of scrutiny in this area. There would potentially be a need to form a shadow scrutiny arrangement as part of the process of reorganisation.

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- A standing item for the Executive was on Asset Disposals. Councillor Ross Mackinnon explained that he intended to explore this at the Executive on 3 July 2025. Councillors Culver and Mackinnon would discuss, post the Executive, if there was scope for scrutiny involvement with asset disposals.
- Members felt it would be useful to receive an update on proposals for the Household Support Fund in due course. The item was scheduled for the Executive in May 2026.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

13 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered its Work Programme (Agenda Item 14) and discussed a number of forthcoming items.

Local Government Reorganisation (Ridgeway Council Formal Proposal) - as discussed as part of the previous item, an outline report would be provided to this Committee at its meeting on 16 September 2025, prior to proposals proceeding to Council and the Executive.

Thames Water and the Environment Agency – the Scrutiny Commission had met with Thames Water and the Environment Agency in the autumn of the past three years. It was however agreed that this year's discussion would be delayed because there had not been the anticipated winter flooding this year. The Committee would consider the scheduling of this matter at a future meeting.

Social Housing – as discussed under the actions log, it had been decided, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders, that the Committee should focus its work in trying to improve and increase social housing in the district.

It was noted that a number of factors could form part of this topic and further work was needed to define what would be covered. This included whether the review would consider affordable housing provision as well as social housing.

The plans for scrutiny of this topic would be discussed further at the next meeting. It was suggested that this could be usefully informed by the receipt of a briefing note from Housing Officers on the current situation and difficulties being faced.

Local Plan – it was noted that historically, detailed work on the different iterations of the Local Plan was undertaken by the Planning Advisory Group which, along with the other Advisory Groups, had ceased to exist and had been replaced by the Policy Development Group (PDG). Future work on a Local Plan would likely need to link in with Local Government Reorganisation and this could be a sizeable topic for the PDG.

Waste – as discussed under the actions log, it was proposed that this be scheduled for the spring/summer of 2026.

Public Transport – Councillor Antony Amirtharaj explained that he would be progressing this with the Portfolio Holder in the first instance and would consider whether he felt it to be a suitable topic for scrutiny.

Pedestrianisation – Members felt that an update on pedestrianisation could be considered by the Committee at its meeting in February 2026, subject to the outcome of trial periods of extended pedestrianisation.

Northcroft Dryside – Councillor Howard Woollaston expressed his concerns in relation to this area which covered the approval and procurement of the works, and the overspend that had been incurred. Councillor Woollaston agreed to draft a set of questions for Portfolio Holders and officers on these matters which would be shared with Councillor Carolyne Culver before being progressed.

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Action:

- **A briefing note would be requested from Housing Officers on the current situation with social housing and the difficulties being faced to help the Committee focus its work in this area.**

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted and updated as discussed.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 9.20pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature