

Notice of Meeting



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Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 16 September 2025 at 6.30pm
in Council Chamber Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

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Date of despatch of Agenda: 8 September 2025

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager) on (01635) 519462

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WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

Agenda - Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 16 September 2025 (continued)

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

Substitutes: Councillors Adrian Abbs, Dennis Benneyworth, Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Biyi Oloko and Clive Taylor

Agenda

| Part I | | Page No. |
|--------|---|-----------|
| 1 | Apologies for Absence To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any). | 1 - 2 |
| 2 | Minutes To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 1 July 2025. | 3 - 14 |
| 3 | Actions from previous Minutes To receive an update on recommendations and actions following the previous Committee meeting. | 15 - 22 |
| 4 | 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 . | 23 - 24 |
| 5 | Petitions To consider any petitions requiring an Officer response. | 25 - 26 |
| 6 | Review of Transformation Programme Purpose: To provide an update on the Council's Transformation Programme. | To Follow |
| 7 | Review of the Library Service performance and funding model Purpose: The purpose of this report is to review the performance of the library service since the introduction of its new funding model in April 2025. | 27 - 40 |



Agenda - Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 16 September 2025 (continued)

- 8 **Capital Financing Performance Report Q1 2025/26** 41 - 54
Purpose: The capital financing performance provided to members reports on the underspends or overspends within the Council's approved capital programme and associated capital financing implications. This report presents the provisional outturn position for financial year 2025/26 as forecast at Quarter 1 against the approved capital programme and summarises the financing implications for financial year 2026/27.
- 9 **Revenue Performance Report Q1 2025/26** 55 - 64
Purpose: To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. This report is Q1, the first report of the 2025/26 financial year. The report details the variance between the budget set in February 2025 and the current forecast of the year end position. This allows the Executive and Scrutiny Commission to consider the authority's current financial position.
- 10 **Task and Finish Group Updates:**
To receive updates from the chairmen of task and finish groups appointed by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.
- a **Sports Hub Task and Finish Group Report** 65 - 102
Purpose: 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.
- b **Project Management Task and Finish Group Update** 103 - 104
Purpose: To present an update on the work of the Project Management Task and Finish Group.
- 11 **Appointment of Task and Finish Groups** 105 - 106
Purpose: To agree the terms of reference and membership for any task and finish groups that the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee may wish to appoint to undertake in-depth scrutiny reviews.
- 12 **Executive Forward Plan September to December 2025** 107 - 116
Purpose: To advise the Committee of items to be considered by West Berkshire Council's Executive, and for Members to decide whether to review any of the proposed items prior to the meeting indicated in the Plan.

Agenda - Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee to be held on Tuesday 16 September 2025 (continued)

- 13 **Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme** 117 - 118
Purpose: To receive new items and agree and prioritise the work programme of the Committee.
- 14 **Exclusion of Press and Public**
RECOMMENDATION: That members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of aspects of the following item as it is likely that there would be disclosure of exempt information of the description contained in the paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 specified in brackets in the heading of each item. [Section 10 of Part 10 of the Constitution](#) refers.

Part II

- 15 **Sports Hub Task and finish Group**
(Paragraph 1 - Information relating to an individual.)
(Paragraph 2 – Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.)

Purpose: 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.

Sarah Clarke.

Sarah Clarke
Interim Executive Director - Resources

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Stephen Chard on telephone (01635) 519462.

Agenda Item 1

Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2025

Item 1 – Apologies

Verbal Item

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DRAFT

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

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 JULY 2025

Councillors Present: Carolyn 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 Carolyn 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 Carolyn 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.

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

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 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 Carolyne 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 Carolyne 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.

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

- 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.

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1 JULY 2025 - MINUTES

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

Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Recommendations and Actions Tracker

The Recommendations and Actions Tracker is a standing item, and documents the progress of formal scrutiny recommendations and suggested actions for improvement made by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee at its public meetings. Items will remain on the tracker until a response has been provided to the Committee by the Executive, council departments, and/or external partners.

Formal Recommendations to Executive

| Ref | Meeting date and agenda item | Scrutiny recommendation | Lead | Target date | Last update | Response | Status |
|-----|------------------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------|-------------|----------|--------|
| | | | | | | | |

Formal Recommendations to External Partners

| Ref | Meeting date and agenda item | Scrutiny recommendation | Lead | Target date | Last update | Response | Status |
|-----|------------------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------|-------------|----------|--------|
| | | | | | | | |

Suggested Actions for Improvement to Council Departments/Partners

| Ref | Meeting date and agenda item | Action | Lead | Target date | Last update | Update | Status |
|-----|--|---|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--|-------------|
| 89 | 7 March 2023: Libraries Review | Consult with town / parish councils to understand what they wanted from the service | Felicity Harrison | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | An update on the Library service is being brought to the meeting on 16 September 2025. (NB: The Libraries Review has been removed from the Executive Forward Plan as it was a legacy item.) | In progress |
| 90 | | Ensure that ‘priorities’, ‘review recommendations’ and ‘opportunities for future investment are aligned and that targets are set | | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 91 | | Libraries report to be updated before submitting it to the Executive | | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 116 | 11 October 2023: Thames Water and Environment Agency | Meet with the EA and West Berkshire Council to discuss the Northbrook in Newbury | EA/Thames Water | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | (Links to Action #143) Thames Water have supported with testing of the Northbrook. WBC have started an initial business case, and had initial conversations with the Environment Agency on potential funding opportunities for flood alleviation. The business case is being finalised, but will be managed in line with the emerging draft Section 19 report after the January 2024 district-wide flooding. This will require EA funding. 03/09/25 - Discussions continue between all parties on this and other related matters. (Also, see Thames Water Q&A #35) | In progress |
| 141 | 25 April 2024: Actions from Previous Minutes | Scrutiny Commission to be updated about progress with Councillor Gourley’s motion (in relation to Thames Water) that was passed at March Council. | Cllr Stuart Gourley | tbc | 08/09/2025 | The Scrutiny Chairman is in dialogue with the Executive Portfolio Holder regarding the timing of future reports. 08/09/25 - The scheduling of this item to be discussed under the Work Programme. | In progress |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|--|---------------------|------------|------------|---|-------------|
| 143 | 25 April 2024: Actions from Previous Minutes | Seek an update from Councillor Gourley about whether action would be taken following the results of the Northbrook tests. | Cllr Stuart Gourley | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | <p>(Links to Action #116)</p> <p>The Environment Officer who joined us on the site visit, has requested a water quality monitoring device to be deployed along the Northbrook. We have a limited number of these devices available and for obvious reasons, they are all currently deployed at sewage treatment works across the Thames catchment. He has also had to focus his time on inspection visits to treatment works but did say he would repeat the request with the officers who manage this equipment, in case one can be made available but we cannot promise this will happen, nor say when this may be possible. Cllr Gourley is continuing to chase the EA for answers on this issue.</p> <p>01/07/25 - concerns on this matter have been brought to the attention of Lee Dillon MP by a resident, the outcome of which would be monitored.</p> <p>05/09/25 - Cllr Gourley has continued to chase the EA for further support with pollution testing, but all systems are deployed elsewhere currently. The EA do not consider this site as a priority at the current time.</p> | In progress |
| 201 | 17 October 2024: Thames Water and Environment Agency | Draft a letter to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in consultation with Councillor Stuart Gourley to lobby for water companies to be made statutory consultees for major planning applications. | Jon Winstanley | 20/06/2025 | 01/07/2025 | 01/07/25 - letter had been sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Response has been received explaining that forthcoming Government consultation will include the subject of statutory consultees in the planning system. | Complete |
| 212 | 26 November 2024: Response to Faraday Road Football Ground queries | Provide details of the project plan and objectives for Faraday Road. | Cllr Nigel Foot | 30/09/2025 | | A draft is being produced. Cllr Foot to clarify some details and will provide a further update following the next meeting of the Faraday Road Steering Group in September. | In progress |
| 223 | 11 February 2025: Actions from Previous Meetings | Follow up with Thames Water regarding Thatcham Sewage Works. | Cllr Carlyne Culver | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | <p>Cllr Culver has contacted Denise Kinsella and awaits a response. Cllr Gourley has also been asked to liaise with Thames Water on this point.</p> <p>01/07/25 - Stephen Chard to seek confirmation on ownership of the Thatcham Sewage Works. Confirmed this is Thames Water.</p> | In progress |

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|---------------|---|--|----------------------|------------|------------|--|-------------|
| 229 | 11 February 2025: Scrutiny Commission Work Programme | Discuss with Councillor Gourley whether headteachers could make representations to TAG re school streets. | Cllr Carolyn Culver | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Cllr Culver has advised Cllr Amirtharaj to contact Cllr Gourley to ask whether this issue can be tabled at a meeting of the Policy Development Group, which has replaced the advisory groups. | Complete |
| 156, 157, 232 | 17 July 2024 & 13 March 2025: Waste Strategy | Undertake benchmarking with other local authorities to check the link between affluence and waste volume. | Daniel Warne | 17/03/2026 | 19/06/2025 | Assigned to officer for action in Q4, following implementation of other key priorities. | In progress |
| | | Consider how measurement and reporting of community litter-picking could be improved, and consider increased provision of community litter-picking kits as part of the Waste Strategy | | 17/03/2026 | 01/07/2025 | Action forms part of adopted Waste Management Strategy. Assigned to officer for action in Q4, following implementation of other key priorities. 01/07/25 - importance highlighted of ensuring that local communities and volunteer groups were aware that litter picking kits were held by parishes. | In progress |
| | | A future report to be brought to the Scrutiny Commission on implementation of the new recycling scheme. | | 17/03/2026 | 01/07/2025 | Agreed this item would be scheduled for the spring/summer of 2026. | In progress |
| 235 | 13 March 2025: Recommendations Tracker | Develop a template for a combined actions and recommendations tracker in consultation with the Scrutiny Commission Chairman | Stephen Chard | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Provided. This is the recommendations tracker. | Complete |
| 236 | 1 July 2025: Corporate Programme | The Corporate Programme to become a standing item. | Stephen Chard | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Confirmation awaited re Corporate Programme actions. | In progress |
| 237 | | Councillor Iain Cottingham to provide an update on progress with the corporate landlord model. | Cllr Iain Cottingham | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 238 | | Councillor Jeff Brooks would be asked to provide an update on progress with iTrent implementation (Phase 2). | Cllr Jeff Brooks | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 239 | 1 July 2025: Changes to the Scrutiny Structure and the Policy Development Group | The PDG Work Programme would be a standing item for this meeting and it was suggested that the PDG receive the scrutiny work programmes. | Stephen Chard | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | PDG meetings are being held on an ad-hoc basis at present. However, the Work Programme is due for development and will be supplied for future meetings. | In progress |
| 240 | 1 July 2025: Capital Financing Report Outturn: 2024/25 | 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 Reduced Provision' had slipped in the current financial year. | Cllr Iain Cottingham | 16/09/2025 | 08/09/2025 | Information provided | Complete |

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|---------------|---|---|--|------------|------------|--|-------------|
| 241 | 1 July 2025: 2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn | 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. | Cllr Iain Cottingham | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Info awaited, to follow for September's agenda. | In progress |
| 242 | 1 July 2025: 2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn | Cllr Iain Cottingham to provide the invest to save business case to Cllr Antony Amirtharaj to provide a fuller explanation of the commissioning work that was involved with procuring SEND provision. | Cllr Iain Cottingham | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | This will be more widely circulated once received. | In progress |
| 243 | 1 July 2025: 2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn | Information was requested on the use of capital receipts for transformation activity as part of the item on Transformation at the next Scrutiny Committee. | Cllr Iain Cottingham | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Info awaited, to follow for September's agenda. | In progress |
| 244 | 1 July 2025: 2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn | A diagram to be provided to help understand how financial governance groups interlinked. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 245 | 1 July 2025: Task and Finish Group Updates | A brief overview of activity would be provided with the agenda papers to provide an update on progress with task and finish groups. | Stephen Chard | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Provided from 16/09/25 onwards. | Complete |
| 246 | 1 July 2025: Task and Finish Group Updates | 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. | Scrutiny Chairmen | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | This is being progressed by Nicki Thomas, Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in the first instance. | In progress |
| 247 | 1 July 2025: Executive Forward Plan (Asset Disposals) | 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. | Cllrs Ross Mackinnon and Carolyne Culver | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 163, 221, 248 | 17 July 2024, 26 November 2024, 1 July 2025: Social Housing | Chairman of Scrutiny Commission to discuss issues relating to Housing First and empty homes with the relevant Executive Portfolio Holder. | Cllr Carolyne Culver | 25/11/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Cllr Culver has contacted Cllr Gaines as housing portfolio holder and Cllr Codling as chairman of Health and Wellbeing, requesting that we establish between the three of us what is the best way forward to develop and scrutinise housing policy in a manner that does not duplicate effort. 01/07/25 - social housing had been identified as the area of focus. | In progress |
| | | Liaise with the Executive Portfolio Holder: Planning and Housing regarding the timing of proposed housing reports | Cllr Carolyne Culver | 25/11/2025 | 01/07/2025 | The Scrutiny Commission Chairman is in dialogue with the Executive Portfolio Holder regarding the timing of future reports. | In progress |

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|-----|--|--|--------------------------------|------------|------------|--|-------------|
| | | The plans for scrutiny of this topic would be discussed further at the next meeting. A briefing note would be requested from Housing Officers on the current situation and the difficulties being faced to help the Committee focus its work in this area. | Stephen Chard/Housing Officers | 25/11/2025 | 01/07/2025 | Briefing note has been requested to help inform further scrutiny work on this topic. | In progress |
| 249 | 1 July 2025: Work Programme (Public Transport) | Councillor Antony Amirtharaj would progress this with the Portfolio Holder in the first instance and would consider whether he felt it to be a suitable topic for scrutiny. | Cllr Antony Amirtharaj | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |
| 250 | 1 July 2025: Work Programme (Northcroft Dryside) | Councillor Howard Woollaston to draft a set of questions for Portfolio Holders and officers in relation to his concerns in this area. They would then be shared with the Chairman before being progressed further. | Cllr Howard Woollaston | 16/09/2025 | 01/07/2025 | | In progress |

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| Cost Centre | Project Title | Budget Manager | Total Approved Budget |
|-------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 81051 | Speed Restriction changes (including 20mph projects) | Andrew Alty | 118,770 |
| 81103 | Accident reduction works | Andrew Alty | 138,220 |
| 81150 | Improvements to key walking routes | Paul Hendry | 44,620 |
| 81160 | Street Lighting Improvements | Andrew Reynolds | 41,970 |
| 81181 | Signing Improvements | Andrew Alty | 1,350 |
| 81186 | Traffic Signal Upgrades | Andrew Alty | 76,060 |
| 81241 | Rights Of Way Volunteer Resource | Paul Hendry | 2,500 |
| 81242 | Imp To Pedestrian | Paul Hendry | 1,790 |
| 81243 | Equal Access to the Countryside | Paul Hendry | 11,630 |
| 81244 | Bridleway Imp Ped | Paul Hendry | 2,450 |
| 81245 | Ridgeway & Thames Path National Trails | Paul Hendry | 18,870 |
| 81246 | Improvements for Cyclists & Equestrians | Paul Hendry | 15,480 |
| 81247 | Statutory Signing of Rights of Way | Paul Hendry | 5,270 |
| 81311 | Future Programme Development | Jon Winstanley | 50,000 |
| 81379 | School Safety Programme (including School Streets) | Andrew Alty | 117,880 |
| 81514 | Public Transport Infrastructure | Andrew Alty | 76,110 |
| 81581 | Kings Road Link, Newbury | Andrew Alty | 100,070 |
| 81639 | Pay Machine Replacement | Emma Jameson | 20,000 |
| 81657 | Access Improvements to Commons & Nature Reserves | Paul Hendry | 55,430 |
| 81668 | Seperate Food Waste | Daniel Warne | 6,560 |
| 81681 | School Streets Capital Investment | Andrew Alty | 3,450 |
| 81682 | Sewerage Treatment Plants | Andrew Reynolds | 93,560 |
| 81691 | Braemore Road Thatcham - Rising Bollard Replacement | Emma Jameson | 50,000 |
| 81692 | London Road - Flood Risk Improvements | Andrew Reynolds | 25,000 |
| 81693 | Transport Model Update | Jenny Graham | 180,000 |
| 81694 | IVC (In Vessel Composting) Permit Sampling Changes | Kofi Adu-Gymafi | 76,000 |
| 82277 | Theale Primary Basic Need Project | Mark Lewis | 105,040 |
| 82285 | Highwood Copse | Mark Lewis | 182,370 |
| 82319 | i-college Alternative Education - East of Area | Mark Lewis | 74,200 |
| 82331 | Aids & Adaptations Special Education Needs & Disabilities Pupils | Neil Goddard | 72,210 |
| 82344 | North Newbury - New primary school | Mark Lewis | 60,650 |
| 82349 | Kennet School Physical Disability Resource | Mark Lewis | 8,510 |
| 82355 | School Modular Building Replacement | Mark Lewis | 65,000 |
| 82357 | Speenhamland Outdoor Area | Mark Lewis | 3,600 |
| 82359 | Satellite Network of Special Provision - Primary | Mark Lewis | 137,500 |
| 82360 | Satellite Network of Special Provision - Secondary Phase 1 | Mark Lewis | 153,450 |
| 82361 | iCollege Expansion (Parsons Down) | Mark Lewis | 116,450 |
| 82362 | SEMH/ASD Resourced Provision (West) – Primary | Mark Lewis | 40,840 |
| 82366 | Kennet PDR (Personal Development & Relationships) - Expansion | Mark Lewis | 234,710 |
| 82367 | Westwood Farm – Key Stage 2 Severe Learning Disability Provision | Mark Lewis | 29,040 |
| 83096 | Open Space Improvements | Paul Hendry | 196,710 |
| 83111 | Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust Capital Projects (BBOWT) | Paul Hendry | 100,000 |
| 83115 | Henwick Sports Pavillion | Paul Hendry | 70,120 |
| 83130 | Developing Natural Carbon Reductions on Council Land | Jenny Graham | 70,000 |
| 83136 | B4009 footway link | Paul Hendry | 9,350 |
| 83137 | Beedon Byway phase 2&3 | Paul Hendry | 9,500 |

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|-------|---|--------------------|---------|
| 83140 | Footpath Ashmore Green | Paul Hendry | 11,800 |
| 83141 | Kintbury Footpath resurfacing | Paul Hendry | 13,650 |
| 83142 | Speen Moors walk | Paul Hendry | 116,210 |
| 83144 | Wash Common Circular West Project 1 & 2 | Paul Hendry | 13,130 |
| 85116 | Playground Equipment Upgrades | Paul Hendry | 107,050 |
| 85122 | Libraries Book Stock | Felicity Harrison | 147,650 |
| 85123 | Royal Berkshire Archives - Planned Enhancements | Felicity Harrison | 40,000 |
| 85125 | Libraries Capital Maintenance - Improvement Works | Felicity Harrison | 41,000 |
| 85134 | Shaw House Capital Maintenance | Felicity Harrison | 3,710 |
| 85143 | West Berkshire Museum - Capital Improvement Works | Janine Fox | 60,980 |
| 85145 | Museum Collections | Janine Fox | 13,960 |
| 85195 | Expansion of Berkshire Records Office. Reading | Felicity Harrison | 163,150 |
| 85196 | Feasibility studies for options to deliver the Leisure Strategy | Jude Thomas | 41,030 |
| 85198 | Hungerford LC - Modular exercise studio | Jude Thomas | 44,120 |
| 85203 | Refurbishment of Kennet Leisure Centre | Jude Thomas | 22,880 |
| 85213 | Dolphin Centre - Dilapidations | Richard Turner | 119,980 |
| 85215 | Cotswold Courts | Jude Thomas | 170,000 |
| 86054 | TeleCare | Kate Toone | 70,650 |
| 86060 | Family conference meeting room at market street | Stacey Bradshaw | 64,460 |
| 87066 | Geographic Information Systems Capital fund | Andy Best | 80,000 |
| 87072 | The Shopmobility Scheme | Alexandra O'Connor | 11,000 |
| 87119 | WBC Condition Surveys | Andi Blinco | 55,000 |
| 87129 | WBC Compliance Surveys | Andi Blinco | 40,000 |
| 87132 | Adult Social Care Capital Enhancement Programme | Richard Pask | 104,030 |
| 87281 | VMWare Hardware Refresh | Andy Best | 60,790 |
| 87282 | Cyber Health / ICT Security Checks | Andy Best | 40,000 |
| 87289 | Superfast Broadband Project Management | Anita Stanbury | 103,360 |
| 87294 | Network Infrastructure (Core Switches) | Andy Best | 90,000 |
| 87305 | VPN Firewall Replacements | Andy Best | 50,000 |
| 87306 | Corporate Storage Systems & Attached Network | Andy Best | 116,000 |
| 87342 | Maintenance of DR Facility | Andy Best | 90,000 |
| 87349 | Corporate Database Server Replacement | Andy Best | 75,000 |
| 87354 | Telephony Infrastructure | Andy Best | 200,000 |
| 87355 | Cyber Security Enhancements | Andy Best | 31,850 |
| 87359 | Internet / Web Filtering | Andy Best | 16,000 |
| 87360 | Backup / Security products for O365 data | Andy Best | 50,000 |
| 87361 | Building Data Warehouse Capability | Andy Best | 67,000 |
| 87363 | Refresh DC A/C & Generator | Andy Best | 25,000 |
| 87364 | Microsoft Copilot Feasibility Study | Andy Best | 55,000 |
| 87512 | Project Management - ICT | Andy Best | 177,260 |
| 87542 | Property Database | Richard Turner | 75,000 |
| 87550 | HR/Payroll System | Paula Goodwin | 29,450 |
| 87601 | Digitalisation Infrastructure/ ICT Allocation | Phil Rumens | 155,000 |
| 87610 | Members Bids | Alexandra O'Connor | 220,000 |
| 87749 | Rural Business Capital Grants | Philippa Venables | 12,800 |
| 87756 | Newbury Town Centre Masterplan | Jehona Hansell | 234,500 |
| 87804 | Project Management - S&G | Anita Stanbury | 186,610 |
| 89907 | Moorside Community Centre Sports Hall | Richard Turner | 90,000 |

Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2025

Item 4 – Declarations of interest

Verbal Item

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Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2025

Item 5 – Petitions

Verbal Item

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Review of the library service performance and funding model

| | |
|---|--|
| Committee considering report: | Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee |
| Date of Committee: | 16 September 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Nigel Foot |
| Date Portfolio Member agreed report: | 8 September 2025 |
| Report Author: | Felicity Harrison |

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the performance of the library service since the introduction of its new funding model in April 2025.
- 1.2 The new offer to develop additional library services which are chargeable, is set within the context of the current financial challenges faced by the Council.

2 Recommendation(s)

To review the performance of the library service since the introduction of the new funding model in April 2025.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|-------------------|---|
| Financial: | <ol style="list-style-type: none">3.1 The net expenditure budget for libraries in 2024/25 was set at £1,265,540, and this increased to £1,414,190 for 2025/26.3.2 In both 2024/25 and 2025/26 the library service has received a contribution of £60k annually from Public Health in recognition of the work by the library service to increase the public health offer:<ol style="list-style-type: none">(a) To implement, support or develop services and projects to tackle social isolation, improve school readiness and increase levels of self-reported wellbeing in the community. |

Review of the library service performance and funding model

| | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-------------------|
| | (b) Activities undertaken by libraries to support the outcomes of Public Health can be split into the 3 main life stages; Starting Well, Living Well and Ageing Well. | | |
| Human Resource: | Not applicable. | | |
| Legal: | Not Applicable | | |
| Risk Management: | Not Applicable | | |
| Property: | Not Applicable | | |
| Policy: | Not Applicable | | |
| | 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? | | | Not applicable. |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | | Not applicable. |
| Environmental Impact: | | X | Not applicable. |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Health Impact: | X | | | Positive links to health and wellbeing. |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | Not applicable. |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | Not applicable. |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | X | | | 5.B. Help our residents lead fulfilled and active lives. 5.5. Increased number of visits to Council-owned culture, arts and heritage facilities |
| Core Business: | | X | | |
| Data Impact: | | X | | Not applicable. |
| Consultation and Engagement: | | | | Not applicable. |
| | | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report sets out how the West Berkshire Libraries Vision is being delivered in the context of a new funding model which took effect from April 2025. As the new funding model has only been in place for a few months, the review period is limited to Q1 of 2025/26. More information about the Libraries Vision can be referenced in Appendix 1.
- 4.2 The main West Berkshire Libraries offer is delivered through eight libraries, along with the library At Home service. The libraries are situated in:
- Burghfield Common
 - Hungerford
 - Lambourn
 - Mortimer
 - Newbury
 - Pangbourne
 - Thatcham
 - Theale
- 4.3 In addition, there is an e-library offering access to e-books, e-audio, e-magazines and e-newspapers.

Review of the library service performance and funding model

- 4.4 All the libraries in West Berkshire are an integral part of the Council's new "Let's Talk" Community Hub Outreach Programme, providing information, advice and support for residents. This is being organised in conjunction with the Building Communities Together team.
- 4.5 All West Berkshire libraries are also part of the national Safe Places Scheme.
- 4.6 Usage of the West Berkshire library service has continued to rise over the past few years. In 24/25 library loans increased on the previous year by 3.46%, and visitor numbers increased by 3.31%.
- 4.7 The net expenditure budget for libraries in 2024/25 was set at £1,265,540, and this increased to £1,414,190 for 2025/26.
- 4.8 In both 2024/25 and 2025/26 the library service has received a contribution of £60k annually from Public Health in recognition of the work by the library service to increase the public health offer:
- (a) To implement, support or develop services and projects to tackle social isolation, improve school readiness and increase levels of self-reported wellbeing in the community.
 - (b) Activities undertaken by libraries to support the outcomes of Public Health can be split into the 3 main life stages; Starting Well, Living Well and Ageing Well.
- 4.9 The previous funding model for libraries was based on asking Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) to make a voluntary contribution of £1 per head of population each year to bridge the revenue funding gap in the library service budget. The total amount received in voluntary contributions had diminished over the years leaving the library service with a continuing deficit. In the Libraries review of 2021/22, it was noted that this funding model needed to be urgently reviewed as it was not a fair system and not financially sustainable. In the 2025/26 budget, the T&PC contributions to the library services and the Council supported an investment bid of £92,900.
- 4.10 Up until the end of March 2025, the service also included a mobile library which travelled around the district, but because of declining usage this was discontinued at the end of the last financial year.
- 4.11 The new funding model and the new chargeable offers to T&PCs have put in place a much fairer system where those contributing, receive a tangible benefit for their parish. This is particularly relevant in rural areas throughout the district.
- 4.12 New chargeable services in place since April 2025:
- (a) Since April 2025, two libraries are now offering additional opening hours to their communities, and this is being funded by parish councils. There has been a marked upturn in visitor numbers and new library members as a result.
 - (b) There are three pop-up libraries in place across the district and all of them are thriving and helping to reduce isolation in rural areas.
 - (c) One community bookshelf is in place at a pre-school.

4.13 The library service is in discussion with several other parishes, and the intention is to increase the number of pop-up libraries in the coming months.

4.14 The new services have been warmly welcomed by residents, and the pop-up forums will be used to provide other services to residents e.g. distributing food waste bags to residents in rural areas on behalf of the Waste Team.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

5.1 West Berkshire Council (“the Council”) has a statutory obligation to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

5.2 This report sets out how the West Berkshire libraries vision is being delivered in the context of a new funding model, particularly in rural areas across the district. The cessation of the mobile library service at the end of March 2025 because of declining usage, is inherently connected to the new libraries offer.

5.3 Library Trend Data

| Library Service KPIs/ Measures of Volume | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | | | | |
| Visitor numbers - physical visits | 201,657 | 277,754 | 311,168 | 321,507 |
| Library loans including e-library | 553,903 | 665,546 | 726,712 | 750,721 |
| New library members | 4,891 | 5,648 | 6,220 | 5,627 |
| Volunteer hours | 10,001 | 12,278 | 12,458 | 13,259 |

Background

5.4 Since 2017/18 the Council had asked T&PCs each year to consider making a voluntary contribution of £1 per resident, based on the population of each parish, to support the delivery of library services throughout the district and bridge a gap in the revenue budget.

5.5 This funding model proved not to be sustainable because of the voluntary nature of the contributions. The fluctuations in the amount of money received from T&PCs from year to year made it difficult to manage services and created a constant pressure on the revenue budget.

5.6 Many parish councils continued making voluntary contributions because of the mobile library service, even though the usage of the service was very low.

5.7 Voluntary contributions from T&PCs decreased significantly after the first three years. The libraries review report from 2021/22 noted that alternative options should be explored and the funding model urgently reviewed.

| West Berkshire Libraries | Financial Year | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Revenue | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2024/25 |
| Library Service Net Expenditure Budget | £1,228,580 | £1,231,110 | £1,295,110 | £1,265,540 |
| Income target for voluntary contributions from T&PCs | £92,900 | £92,900 | £92,900 | £92,900 |
| Contributions received | -£75,227 | -£38,030 | -£14,390 | -£38,398 |
| Revenue Budget Shortfall | £17,673 | £54,870 | £78,510 | £54,502 |

5.8 In November 2024, it was confirmed that the Council would no longer ask for voluntary contributions, and a new library offer was put forward to T&PCs for the financial year 2025/26 where instead of making voluntary contributions, they could purchase additional library services which would benefit residents. Extra council funding of £92,900 was added to the 2025/26 libraries revenue budget to cover this, through an investment bid.

- (a) **Purchasing Additional Library Opening Hours:** T&PCs with a library in their catchment area can purchase additional library opening hours at their local branch in line with community requirements e.g. extending Saturday opening hours or opening in the evening. **Charge:** Amount charged based on actual running costs of each library rather than £1 per head of population. Will be reviewed annually.
- (b) **Pop-up Libraries:** Suitable for those parishes without a library branch in their locality. A pop-up library is a collection of 350+ books and resources made available on a regular basis to the community at a venue chosen by the parish e.g. village hall or community centre. This option is staff/volunteer supported to provide added value and establish a rapport with residents to develop a community hub feeling. Services offered include:
 - Book reservations made online can be collected at the pop-up venue.
 - Advice available on what to read next.
 - Advice available on how to use the e-library service.
 - Advice available on encouraging children to read.
 - Link with existing events such as pre-school sessions.
 - Advice drop-in sessions with other Council services.

Charge: Based on staff time/travel costs/support costs/venue hire fees

- (c) **Community Bookshelf:** A collection of books (in the region of 150 books), delivered to a suitable venue identified by the parish council. Book collections are changed and replenished quarterly with new titles. **Charge:** Based on staff time/travel and book stock purchased (WBC can purchase books at discounted rates through consortium membership therefore providing better value for money).

5.9 In addition to the chargeable offers to T&PCs, the following free services continue to be part of the new libraries offer:

- (a) **At Home Library Service:** For those residents who find it difficult to visit their local library because of age, disability, lack of access to transport, or caring responsibilities, we will bring the library service to them. We match each person with a DBS checked volunteer who will find out about their reading tastes, choosing and delivering books to their home every three weeks at a pre-arranged time. Favourite authors or particular titles can be requested.
- (b) **Community Outreach Visits:** Linking in with existing events e.g. village hall coffee mornings, community cafes. Pre-ordered book reservations can be dropped off to residents by a volunteer.
- (c) **e-Library Services:** A wide selection of e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and e-newspapers are available to read and download.

5.10 At the same time as developing the new library offers to T&PCs, plans were moving forward to end the mobile library service because of declining usage – only 239 customers used this service in 2024/25. After a public consultation which took place in February 2025, this service was withdrawn on the 1st April 2025, allowing the Council to reduce expenditure by £42,080 annually. As part of the consultation process an Equalities Impact Assessment was drawn up and the mitigating factors for this are intrinsically linked to the new library offer as outlined above.

6 Review of Current Situation

- 6.1 For the financial year 2025/26, the Libraries revenue budget was increased to £1,414,190, and the income target linked to T&PC voluntary contributions was removed.
- 6.2 This means that any additional income received through the chargeable library offers, is over and above the base budget. To date, £14,393 of gross income has been received through this new initiative.
- 6.3 The new chargeable library services offers have been costed as follows:
 - (a) Additional opening hours at existing libraries: the amount charged is based on actual running costs per hour.
 - (b) Pop-up libraries: the amount is based on staff costs; travel costs, hall hire costs.
 - (c) Community Bookshelf: the amount charged is based on staff/volunteer costs, travel costs, book stock costs.

The £14,393 gross income received so far is offset by the cost to the Council of providing these additional services, and the costs are calculated on a charge recovery basis specifically for each parish. There are so many different variables to consider for each different location and a one size fits all cost would not be appropriate.

- 6.4 **Purchasing Additional Library Opening Hours:** two West Berkshire libraries are now offering additional opening hours.
 - (a) **Lambourn Library:** from 01/05/2025 the library opening hours have increased from 16 to 18 per week. As a result of a resident survey carried out

by the Parish Council, the additional hours are being used to target an after-school audience 3.30-5.30pm each Thursday, offering an additional day option for residents. A children's book club will be launching in September as a targeted activity to add value in this extra session. In the two months of Q1, library loans remained in line with the previous year, but visitor numbers rose to 3,204 (+27%). The additional hours have been funded by East Garston Parish Council, Lambourn Parish Council and the Friends of Lambourn Library.

- (b) **Pangbourne Library:** from 1/04/2025 the library opening hours increased from 22 to 23.5 per week. The 1.5 additional hours are used to extend the Saturday hours from 10am to 2pm after an analysis of footfall and library loans was carried out. In Q1 library loans increased by 2%, visitor numbers increased by 5.14%. New members increased by 56%, indicating that the extended opening hours are attracting a new tranche of residents who were not previously using the library. Additional activities are now offered on Saturdays, including children's author sessions, board games club and a poetry in the library read aloud group. The additional hours have been funded by Pangbourne Parish Council.

6.5 **Pop-up libraries:** three pop-up libraries are now up and running across the district, and discussions are taking place with another two parishes interested in providing this service to residents.

- (a) **Compton:** The pop-up library trial ran from September 2024 – March 2025, for 2 hours every second Thursday morning at Compton Village Hall at the same time as a pre-school session for under 5s

Good links with the pre-school developed, and children were able to choose books and have a Storytime as part of the pop-up session. Library membership and interest in the pop-up began to grow. The initiative was warmly welcomed by the Compton community.

Compton Parish Council carried out a survey towards the end of the trial period, and the feedback received reinforced the positivity from the community regarding the provision of the pop-up library. This resulted in funding being made available by the parish for this service to continue for the financial year 2025/26, although the frequency of visits was reduced to monthly, and the visit time reduced to 1.5 hours per session. For the three library sessions at Compton in Q1 of 2025/26 there were 71 visitors, 188 library loans, 21 reservations made and 5 new library members.

- (b) **Basildon:** Pop-up library takes place at St. Stephen's Church for two hours each month, 10am-12pm and is funded by Basildon Parish Council. Between April and June 2025, the Upper Basildon Pop-up Library was open for three sessions: 32 visitors, 39 library loans, 14 book reservations, and 4 new library members. It is part of a valued community hub, providing access to books and friendly support running alongside the post office drop in and the weekly coffee morning.
- (c) **Leckhampstead:** Pop-up library takes place at the village hall for 2 hours each month, 10am to 12pm. Since its launch in May 2025, two library sessions have

been held: 21 visitors, 60 library loans, 13 book reservations, and 6 new library members. The library offers book browsing, collection of reservations ordered online, and friendly support. It operates alongside the weekly coffee morning, which helps to create a warm, inter-generational community atmosphere. Feedback from residents and the Parish Council has been very positive. The pop-up has been funded anonymously by a resident for this financial year, and the library service is in discussion with the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee to determine whether funding will be made available to continue into 2026/27.

6.6 Community Bookshelf:

(a) Basildon Children's Community Bookshelf

The Children's Community Bookshelf at Basildon was stocked with 200 books in April 2025 and then refreshed in July with a new selection of 200 titles, ensuring a diverse and engaging range of reading materials for young readers. Two storytime sessions have been held with the toddler group, both warmly received and instrumental in promoting early literacy and fostering community engagement. At the July session, families were encouraged to participate in the Summer Reading Challenge. This service is funded by Basildon Parish Council.

- 6.7 The library service is providing quarterly updates to all parishes receiving additional chargeable services, outlining the community benefits as well as the performance statistics. Discussions with parishes will be instigated in the near future to make a case for the funding to continue into 2026/27.

7 Other services offered through libraries

- 7.1 In addition to the chargeable offers to T&PCs, the following free services are part of the new libraries offer:
- 7.2 **e-Library Services:** The e-library service was recently re-tendered to simplify the offer for residents and offer access to e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazines and e-newspapers through one digital platform. There is now just one e-library supplier, and during the transition period to the new supplier in Q1 there were 71,257 e-library loans, a slight dip of -2%. e-Library reservations surged by over 35% during the transition period and further growth is expected in the number of loans in Q2.
- 7.3 **At Home Library Service:** The At Home service has been promoted widely, particularly to those residents who were mobile library customers and may find it difficult to visit their local library. In Q1 library loans through this service surged by 104% to 2,427, and 535 At Home visits were carried out – an increase of 166% on the previous year. The criteria for the At Home service was broadened to include lack of access to transport.
- 7.4 **Community Outreach Visits:** Linking in with existing events such as village hall coffee mornings and community cafes. Pre-ordered online book reservations can be dropped off to residents, and engagement with the library service is encouraged through social interaction.

| Location | Frequency | Average number of visitors per session |
|---------------------------|-----------|--|
| Beech Hill Memorial Hall | 3 weekly | 5 |
| Beenham Village Hall | monthly | 5 |
| Benedict Court, Newbury | 3 weekly | 7 |
| Curridge WI Hall | monthly | 8 |
| Inglewood House, Kintbury | 3 weekly | 6 |

7.5 **Community Hub Outreach Programme “Let’s Talk”:** All West Berkshire libraries are key venues as part of this new programme which aims to improve access to advice and support within local communities. Customers already recognise that libraries:

- Are trusted spaces for accessing information.
- Are digital access points for residents who lack personal devices.
- Offer support with form filling and applications through digital support sessions.
- Provide health and wellbeing advice through Reading Well books and Wellbeing bags.
- Provide opportunities for social connection and engagement with customers in daily interactions and through the regular events programmes.

7.6 **Safe Places Scheme:** All West Berkshire libraries are part of the national Safe Places Scheme, offering a secure location for individuals who feel anxious, scared, or at risk.

8 Outcomes

- 8.1 The new funding model is a fairer system, as parishes receive additionality through a clear service benefit for their residents, if they choose to subscribe.
- 8.2 Closer and more effective partnership working with T&PCs has been enabled to confirm what they want from the library service, and how they can help us deliver it. In effect the participating T&PCs have become stakeholders in the service, and it has given them a sense of control in the future development of the library service in their parish.
- 8.3 The funding model is now sustainable as it doesn’t rely on voluntary contributions.
- 8.4 Engagement with residents has clearly increased in participating parishes and this has provided a forum for the Council to further develop the concept of a community hubs in a variety of new settings through the “Let’s Talk” Community Hub Outreach Programme.
- 8.5 Rural isolation is being reduced in specific parishes by the new library initiatives.
- 8.6 The public library contribution to the positive health and well-being of local communities is being formally recognised through the receipt of annual grant funding.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The previous library funding model which commenced in 2017/18 relied on voluntary contributions from T&PCs to balance the libraries revenue budget.

Review of the library service performance and funding model

- 9.2 There was no incentive for T&PCs to make the contribution as they were not receiving a tangible benefit for their parish, and the level of contributions diminished after the first few years. The library service was left with a continuing budget deficit year on year ranging from £17,673 - £78,510 and it was clear that this funding model had become unsustainable. The Libraries Review in 2021/22 called for an urgent review.
- 9.3 In this financial year 2025/26, the new sustainable funding model was put in place and the libraries base budget increased by £92,900 to cover the running costs of the 8 libraries across the district, plus the At Home service.
- 9.4 T&PCs now have the choice to purchase bespoke library services for their parish. As a result, we now have 6 additional library offers which are benefitting those parishes, and early indications are that they are being well received and well used by residents.
- 9.5 Delivering library services to rural areas can be both a challenge and an opportunity to innovate. The new funding model has created an opportunity for creative solutions to be put in place in West Berkshire through using different venues as pop-up libraries
- 9.6 The future challenge will be to replicate this early success across more parishes in the district and to progress alongside this the new “Let’s Talk” Community Hub Outreach Programme for residents.

10 Appendices

Appendix A – Libraries Vision Graphic

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

Name: Felicity Harrison
Job Title: Culture and Libraries Manager
Tel No: 01635 503087
E-mail: felicity.harrison@westberks.gov.uk

Document Control

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| Document Ref: | | Date Created: | |
| Version: | | Date Modified: | |
| Author: | | | |
| Owning Service | | | |

Change History

| Version | Date | Description | Change ID |
|---------|------|-------------|-----------|
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |

DEVELOP COMMUNITY HUBS



- All libraries becoming part of the Safe Places Scheme within West Berkshire
- Implement Community Hub activities through the Let's Talk initiative
- Engage with town and parish councils to extend library provision through a revised funding model
- Continue to develop partnership projects such as those with Berkshire Music Trust, Educafe, The Corn Exchange and City Arts

MAKE LIBRARIES MORE ACCESSIBLE THROUGH NEW DELIVERY MODELS



- Continue to promote the At Home Library Service for families without transport and residents with age or mobility challenges
- Collaborate with town and parish councils to provide library offers that meet local needs
- Continue to develop and promote pop-up libraries and the community bookshelves
- Extend library opening hours to offer more flexible access for residents

IMPROVE AWARENESS OF LIBRARY SERVICES WITH SELDOM HEARD COMMUNITIES



- Work with Public Health, Children and Family Services, and wider health partners to introduce targeted activity programmes
- Support the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) initiative with library visits and Summer Reading Challenge promotion
- Enhance library accessibility and inclusivity by making libraries more dementia and neurodiverse friendly

TARGET LITERACY AND PROMOTE INDEPENDENT LEARNING AS WELL AS READING FOR PLEASURE



- Deliver the Summer Reading Challenge in partnership with The Reading Agency
- Support the Bookstart programme by distributing free books to babies and offering targeted programmes for children with special educational needs
- Work with Educafe at Newbury Library to reach non-native English speakers
- Run the West Berkshire Book Challenge for adults every summer

ENHANCE DIGITAL SERVICES IN LINE WITH COMMUNITY NEEDS



- Start a Digital Device Loan Initiative
- Promote the West Berkshire Libraries digital Escape Room for young people
- Implement Wi-Fi printing in library buildings
- Offer digital support sessions at libraries to prevent digital exclusion

DIVERSIFY AND INCREASE INCOME STREAMS



- Support libraries to host a range of chargeable events such as craft sessions, author talks
- Continue to support Libraries Friends Groups to explore additional funding opportunities
- Explore new income streams within libraries by offering services such as: banking, post office services, DWP support
- Increase room hire bookings for libraries during and outside of opening hours

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Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2025/26 Quarter One

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 25 September 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Iain Cottingham |
| Date Portfolio Member agreed report: | |
| Report Author: | Christopher Dagnall |

1 Purpose of the Report

The capital financing performance provided to members reports on the underspends or overspends within the Council's approved capital programme and associated capital financing implications. This report presents the provisional outturn position for financial year 2025/26 as forecast at Quarter 1 against the approved capital programme and summarises the financing implications for financial year 2026/27.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Members are asked:

- (a) To approve the 2025/26 Quarter 1 reprofiling proposal of £12.65m. (Appendix A- summarises reprofiling requests)
- (b) To note the Q1 Budget Reconciliation in Appendix B
- (c) Members are informed of the following adjustments to the 2025/26 capital programme:
 - £60,000 of external grant (UKSPF) for Community Garden at Shaw House
 - To note that the allocation of £0.2 million of grant funding relates to the Kennet Physically Disabled Resource (PDR) expansion to ensure that associated expenditure for the planned project is managed appropriately.

- (d) Members are asked to approve:

£678k of Council funding relating to Digital Infrastructure Group needs to be re-instated. This request (2025/26) is an outstanding ring-fenced amount (£1,354k) allocated to the DIG (over 25/26 and 26/27) but omitted in error to be carried forward into 2023/24.

This request is reinstatement of those already approved allocations in 2015. ([West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Executive on Tuesday 9 June 2015, 5.30 pm](#)) The DIG has existing spending commitments that need to be covered in 2025/26,

returning Building Digital UK's (BDUK) portion of underspend for Superfast Broadband Phase 2 Giga clear West Berkshire, Giga clear Phase 3 East Berks and Openreach Phase 3.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

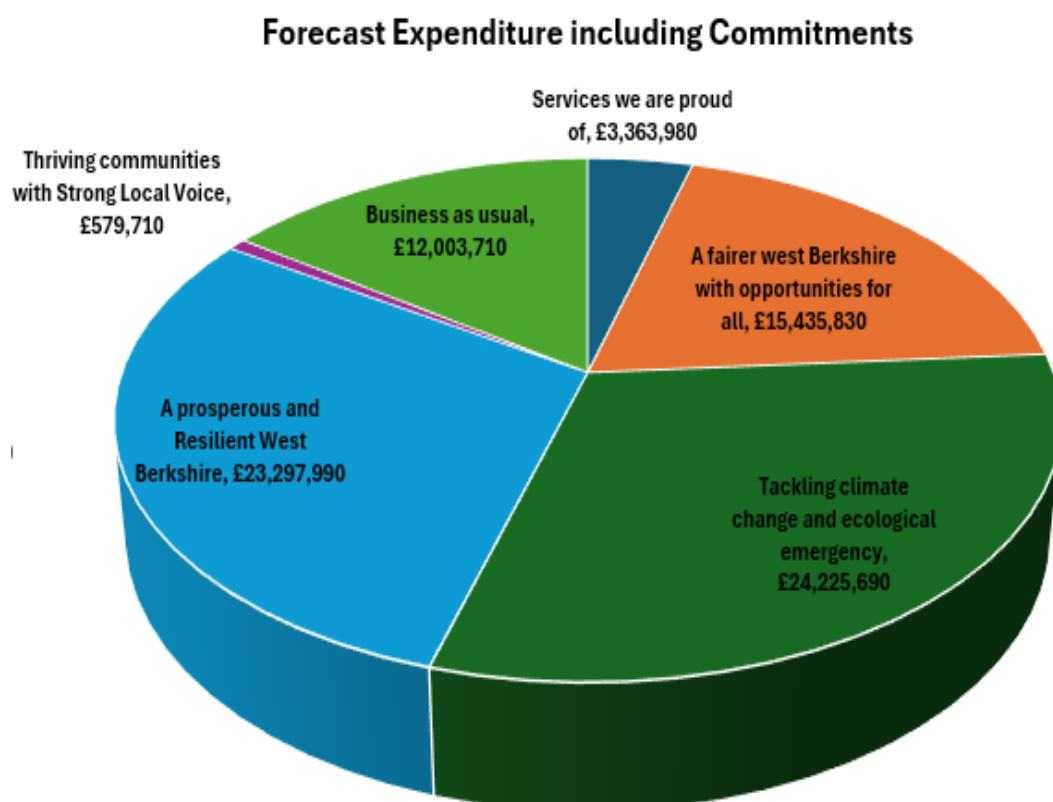
| Implication | Commentary |
|-------------------------|--|
| Financial: | <p>The forecast outturn position is expenditure of £78.9 million against a planned programme budget of £93.3 million, an overall forecast underspend of £14.4 million.</p> <p>Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) interest rate stands at 4.25% compared to a historic borrowing average of 3-4%. In a financial climate where interest rates remain high, the Council may need to address the potential risk of raised interest costs on any new external borrowing undertaken. The Council has sought to mitigate risk and retain interest costs at a low level via a strategy of internal borrowing (utilising its own resources and via an optimum combination of long-term and short-term borrowing). The Council's Investment and Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2025/26 supports the delivery of the capital programme and has been underscored with the same accounting principles.</p> <p>Consistent with the 2024/25 financial year, an in-depth Q1 reprofiling exercise has been undertaken in 2025/26. Reprofiling will be reassessed later in the financial year, within the review of the Council's year-end outturn position.</p> |
| Human Resource: | Not applicable |
| Legal: | <p>The CIPFA Prudential Code (the Code) requires the Council to consider capital and investment opportunities in the light of overall organisational strategy and be mindful of the need to ensure that decision-making is made having sufficient regard to the long-term financial implications and associated risks. To demonstrate that Local Authorities have satisfied these objectives, the Code specifies several indicators but does not define exact indicative limits or ratios. Local Authorities can set their own limits and ratios, subject to controls in Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2003. The capital programme is a key driver of the Council's treasury management activities.</p> |
| Risk Management: | <p>The Council is exposed to inflationary cost pressures within the capital programme. Furthermore, any rise in PWLB borrowing rates resulting from increases in bank rates will result in inflated interest costs on any new borrowing undertaken. Such external</p> |

| | | | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | risks are largely outside of the Council's control. The Council continues to procure appropriate advice from its engaged external treasury specialist to determine the optimum time and structure for any new borrowing undertaken. | | | |
| Property: | Not applicable | | | |
| Policy: | Not applicable | | | |
| | 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 | | |
| 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 | | |
| Health Impact: | | X | | |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | X | | |
| Core Business: | | X | | |
| Data Impact: | | X | | |
| Consultation and Engagement: | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director for Finance, Property and Procurement) (s151 Officer) Asset and Capital Group (ACG) | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The capital programme facilitates the delivery of key schemes focused on supporting the approved Council Strategy. At Q1 £78.9 million of expenditure has been forecast across capital schemes for financial year 2025/26:



- 4.2 In respect of financing the capital programme, the Council's total sum of long-term and short-term borrowings to fund capital spend was £267 million as at 31 March 2025. Whilst the Bank of England (BoE) Bank Rate is 4.25% following a period of three

consecutive rate reductions (25 base points each) in 2024/25, and one reduction in the current financial year, the BoE indicated that a gradual approach to future interest rate cuts will remain in place due to heightened uncertainty in the UK economy. Fluctuations in Bank Rates have been driven by high levels of inflation, and this has been reflected in increases in Local Government borrowing costs through rises in PWLB borrowing rates. At the time of writing, inflation has significantly lowered but rates for a 25-year annuity loan are approximately 5.79%, compared to a historic borrowing average of 3%-4%.

- 4.3 The Council will need to address the risk of increased costs arising from any new external borrowing undertaken to support the delivery of intended capital works. The capital programme was formulated with the expectation that new external borrowing would be required to support such delivery. The Council has sought to mitigate the associated risks via a strategy of undertaking a combination of long-term borrowing from PWLB financing, short-term borrowing and utilising existing cash balances. The strategy of retaining borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing, has reduced overall risk and has been the main driver for interest costs remaining at a relatively low level. The Investment and Borrowing Strategy for financial year 2025/26 has reflected these same objectives. The Council's current weighted average cost of borrowing is approximately 3.94%, and this is considerably lower than current borrowing rates.
- 4.4 It should be noted that Capital financing costs is combination of interest charges and debt repayments in the form of Minimum Revenue Provision. MRP is incurred a year in arrears. In practical terms, this means that the debt repayments 2025/26 capital expenditure will transfer to financial year 2026/27.

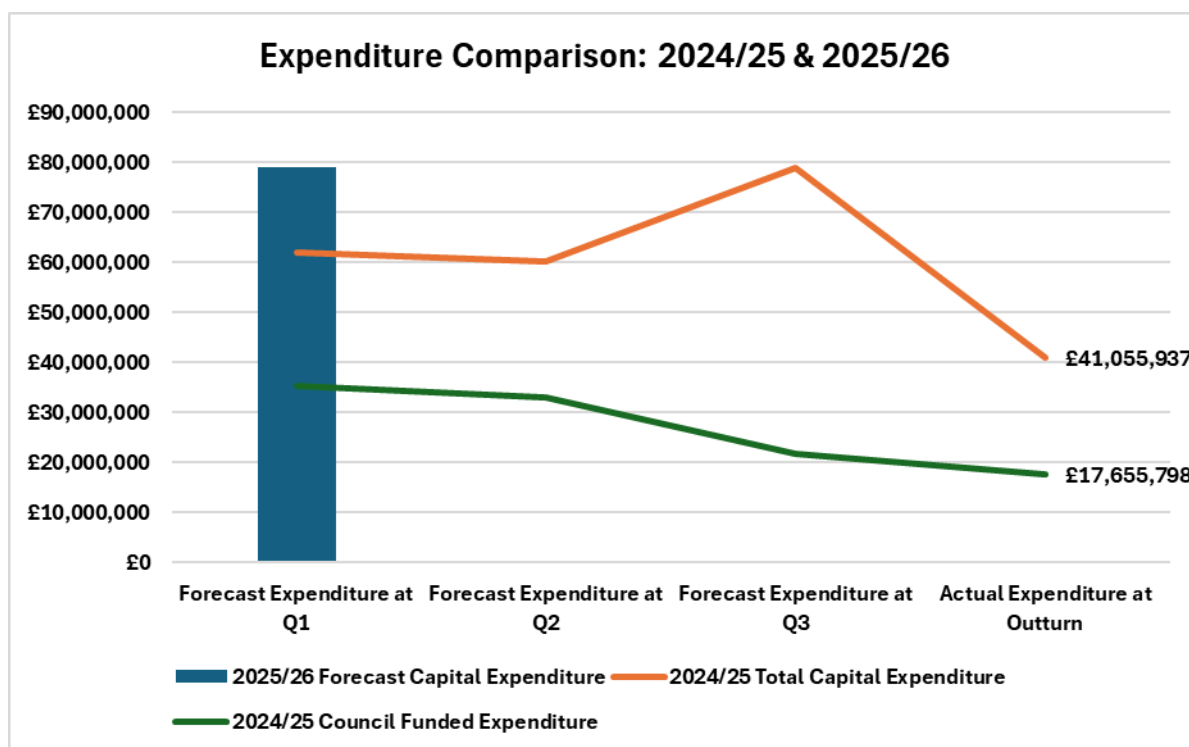
5 Supporting Information:

Background

- 5.1 Capital expenditure and its supporting financing have long-term financial consequences for the Council. Expenditure approval is therefore subject to both national regulatory and local policy frameworks.
- 5.2 The 2025/26 capital programme was agreed by Council in March 2025 with a gross expenditure budget of £73 million divided between externally funded expenditure of £37.9 million and £35.1 million of Council-funded spend. Repayments of principal (capital) sums and interest on loans used to fund capital expenditure are met from the revenue budget for capital financing and risk management.
- 5.3 A sum of £16.7 million was included in the capital programme for 2025/26. This amount is carried forward from the 2024/25 capital programme. During financial year 2025/26, other additions/adjustments of £3.5 million are in respect of additional grant sums received, Section 106 amounts and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocations received in-year or new bids received during the year. Within the budget monitoring process, the forecast year-end positions of capital projects and proposals for unutilised budgets to be reprofiled are reviewed by ACG (Asset and Capital Group). At Q1 the revised capital programme budget proposed a reprofiling total of £12.65 million, this amount rolled forward to financial year 2026/27.

5.4 The capital programme is planned and mapped against the approved Council Strategy. At Q1 expenditure of £78.9 million has been forecast against the revised capital programme of £93.3 million, resulting in a forecast favourable variance of £14.3 million.

5.5 The graphic below summarises the in-year forecasting by quarter against the original and revised budget position:



Q1 Forecast

5.6 The Council invests heavily to ensure that West Berkshire remains an affluent area that is prosperous, resilient, and supportive of the most vulnerable residents. Key projects to be undertaken in-year include: - investment within the Education estate including the Basic Needs expansion project at Castle School (£2.3 million), Falkland Primary School (£2.2m), additional Special Educational Needs (SEN), mental health provision improvements at primary school level and various other projects (£3.8 million) and enhancements to educational buildings across the district (£3.8 million). Investment within Communities includes £2.7 million to complete the dry side provision at Northcroft Leisure Centre and £2.5 million to undertake the expansion of the Berkshire Records Office. Capital enhancement within Place includes £16 million towards the Council's renewable energy provision for a solar farm. £10.6 million of intended expenditure has been set aside for bridges, highways and public infrastructure enhancements across the district with an additional £2.2 million in respect of ongoing improvements to train stations (Newbury at £1.7 million and Theale being £0.5 million).

5.7 Substantial investment is also required to maintain and enhance business as usual activities, primarily in respect of planned improvements to critical business systems. £3.7 million of expenditure has been budgeted for in the financial year with £3.3 million estimated to be incurred by year-end. Key projects are: - the implementation of a new social care management system (£1.2 million), procurement of a new finance system

(£1 million), replacement of IT hardware (£0.4 million) and enhancements to the corporate estate (£0.7 million).

- 5.8 Q1 forecast expenditure is indicative of an overall delivery of planned expenditure of 84.6%.

From a directorate and service level perspective the forecast position is as follows:

| Service | Budget | Forecast | Actual | Variance | Reprofile |
|---------------------------------|--------|----------|--------|----------|-----------|
| | £m | £m | £m | £m | £m |
| Adult Social Care | 2.99 | 2.33 | 0.13 | 0.66 | 0.00 |
| Children's Social Care | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Education & SEND | 15.65 | 13.00 | 1.09 | 2.64 | 2.26 |
| Development & Housing | 4.29 | 3.26 | 0.88 | 1.03 | 0.09 |
| Community Services | 8.72 | 7.40 | 1.39 | 1.33 | 1.25 |
| Environment | 55.18 | 46.54 | 5.29 | 8.64 | 8.92 |
| Finance, Property & Procurement | 3.24 | 3.04 | 0.32 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Transformation, Customer & ICT | 3.19 | 3.33 | 0.79 | (0.15) | 0.13 |
| | 93.26 | 78.91 | 9.88 | 14.35 | 12.65 |

Conclusion

- 5.9 The capital programme is subject to several critical financial risks. Construction inflation potentially results in contracts being subject to a reduction in scope to deliver completion within agreed financial terms, and tenders for new individual projects present significant increases within their risk profiles. The scale of the capital programme is directly impacted by the availability of sufficient financial and people resourcing, both internally and externally.
- 5.10 The Code directs the Council to continually assess capital and investment plans considering overall organisational strategy and resource levels to ensure that operational decisions taken incorporate assessment of long-term financing implications and wider risks to the Council. A key indicator is the authorised limit for external debt, which was approved in March 2025. This is at £402.9 million for 2025/26. In addition to the borrowing levels required to fund capital expenditure, the limit also allows for debt embedded in the Waste PFI contract, the capital accounting implications following the Council's adoption of IFRS 16 leases (effective 1 April 2024) and any temporary borrowing required to complement cashflow requirements during the financial year.
- 5.11 As at 31 March 2025, the Council's total level of long-term borrowing to fund capital spend was £202.7 million. During financial year 2024/25, a management strategy to avoid increasing long-term borrowing in respect of PWLB financing was adopted and expenditure needs were reprofiled accordingly. The Council focussed on supporting delivery of the capital programme through short-term borrowings and utilising existing cash balances. The strategy of retaining borrowings and investments below their underlying levels to manage risk and minimise interest costs has reduced the adverse

financial impacts that would otherwise have been noted due to increased PWLB rates. This strategy has continued during the first quarter in 2025/26.

- 5.12 Capital financing costs are £1.5m lower than anticipated at the end of Q1, this owing to the embedded strategy of prioritising short-term borrowing, operating within the confines of the treasury maturity framework. The Council retained an average weighted cost of capital of 3.94%. During Q1, officers have secured long-term borrowing and short-term borrowing to facilitate delivery of the Council's capital programme. Careful monitoring has been undertaken given the wider uncertainty of the current financial climate, and a regular review of cashflow balances has assisted in supporting an optimum utilisation of internal cash balances to limit the exposure to undertaking any unnecessary borrowing later in this financial year. As at 30 June 2025, the proportion of total borrowing that matures within 12 months is 26.78%, and the weighted average interest rate for borrowing (excluding PFI and lease liabilities) is 3.86%.
- 5.13 The duration of loan spread enables the Council to manage cashflows and continue to monitor interest rate risk. The expectation is that borrowing costs will increase in future. By sourcing shorter-term loans, the Council will have the flexibility to refinance at a lower rate in the future and subsequently reduce exit penalties from existing financing. The Council remains mindful of the need to strike a balance between short-term borrowing and long-term borrowing, and there is a continuing need to ensure that the limits of short-term borrowing (30%) remain consistent, to avoid the risk of overreliance on short-term finance, forsaking the benefits of longer-term financing. As at 31 March 2025, the Council held £247 million of PWLB loans whereas Local Authority loans (short-term debt) are at £20 million at the Balance Sheet date. Short-term loans equate to 24.1% of the Council's total borrowings (£202.7 million long-term balance and £64.5 million short-term amount).
- 5.14 In August 2021 HM Treasury (HMT) reflected significant content changes within their revised guidance for the PWLB lending facility, and CIPFA published its new Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (Prudential Code) and Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice (the Treasury Management Code) on 20 December 2021. The guidance stated that it is not prudent for Local Authorities to take investment or spending decisions that will increase their Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) unless the decisions taken directly enhance service delivery. The 2025/26 capital programme is expected to inflate the Council's CFR to £346 million (2026 in the graphic immediately below). This estimate does not include an additional £10 million that the Council is required to maintain as a continual safety net to ensure that liquidity conditions are not breached:

| | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 |
|--|------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Actual | Actual | Projection | Projection | Projection |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Capital Financing requirement | 292,869.92 | 319,711.33 | 354,454.47 | 372,791.09 | 387,099.67 |
| Less other debt liabilities (PFI) | (9,807) | (8,892) | (7,920) | (6,890) | (5,796) |
| Less other debt liabilities (Other leases) | - | (549) | (549) | (549) | (549) |
| Loans Capital Financing Req. | 283,062.92 | 310,270.36 | 345,985.16 | 365,352.29 | 380,754.26 |
| Less: Existing External Borrowing | (248,973) | (267,242) | (202,732) | (168,511) | (164,227) |
| Internal (Over) Borrowing | 34,089.71 | 43,028.74 | 143,252.82 | 196,841.05 | 216,527.70 |
| Less: Balance Sheet Resources | (51,363) | (60,334) | (48,466) | (37,766) | (18,351) |
| Investments / (New Borrowing) | 17,273.63 | 17,305.69 | (94,786) | (159,075) | (198,176) |

5.15 Capital financing costs are incurred a year in arrears and therefore the cost of financing 2025/26 capital expenditure will roll into financial year 2026/27. Based upon the outturn position, the Council's Balance Sheet forecast indicates that additional borrowing may be required later in financial year 2025/26. It should be noted that the Balance Sheet resources assumption is based upon the Council's Draft 2024/25 Statement of Accounts, taking into consideration usable reserves of £41.7 million.

5.16 Comparing the Council's actual borrowing profile with an alternative strategy, a liability benchmark has been calculated disclosing the lowest risk level attached to borrowing. This assumes the application of the forecasts in the table immediately above, but that cash and investment balances are retained at a minimum level of £10 million at each year-end to maintain sufficient liquidity. The liability benchmark is an important tool to assist in establishing whether the Council is likely to be a long-term borrower or long-term investor in the future, and this data will complement strategic decision-making. The liability benchmark represents an estimate of the cumulative amount of external borrowing that the Council must hold to fund its current capital and revenue commitments whilst retaining treasury investments at the minimum level required to manage daily cashflow needs. Councils are required to publish their individual liability benchmark:

| | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Actual | Projection | Projection | Projection | Projection |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Loans Capital Financing Req. | 283,062.92 | 310,270.36 | 345,985.16 | 365,352.29 | 380,754.26 |
| Less: Balance Sheet Resources | (51,363) | (60,334) | (48,466) | (37,766) | (18,351) |
| Net Loans Requirement | 231,699.58 | 249,935.93 | 297,518.73 | 327,585.86 | 362,402.87 |
| Preferred Year-end Position | 10,000.00 | 10,000.00 | 10,000.00 | 10,000.00 | 10,000.00 |
| Liability Benchmark | 241,699.58 | 259,935.93 | 307,518.73 | 337,585.86 | 372,402.87 |

Please refer to *Appendix C Quarter One Liability Benchmarks* for further details

5.17 Based on the Council's CFR and the liability benchmark, and as illustrated in the table above, the Council is expected to be a long-term borrower. The Council must ensure that capital financing is reasonable and affordable in the long-term. CIPFA recommends that the optimum position for external borrowing is at the level of the liability benchmark, in that all Balance Sheet resources should be used to maximise internal borrowing. If the outputs identify future periods where external loans are below the liability

benchmark, this is indicative of a borrowing requirement, thus identifying the points at which the Council is most exposed to interest rate, liquidity and refinancing fluctuations.

5.18 Conversely, where external loans exceed the liability benchmark, this highlights an over-borrowed position which will result in excess cash requiring investment, thus exposing the Council to potential credit and reinvestment risks. The liability benchmark is a projection of the amount of loan debt outstanding that the Council requires on an annual basis to service existing debt liabilities, intended prudential borrowing and other planned and unplanned cost commitments. The benchmark in the graphic details the gap between the Council's outstanding loans at future points in time and the need to undertake additional borrowing (the benchmark). The indicator can be used to identify the debt maturities needed for new borrowing, matched to future liabilities.

5.19 Based upon the outturn position, the Council is currently under-borrowed. The Council is currently utilising cashflows to maintain an optimum internal borrowing position, resulting in external borrowing levels reducing against the liability benchmark. On the basis that this current borrowing pattern remains below the Council's CFR, there is confidence that capital expenditure is affordable into 2027.

6 Appendices

Appendix A - Reprofitting Requests

Appendix B - Budget Reconciliation

Appendix C - Liability Benchmark

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 Scrutiny Task Group within preceding six months ☒

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☐

Wards affected: All

Officer details:

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Document Control

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| Author: | | | |
| Owning Service | | | |

Change History

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Quarter One: Reprofitting Requests

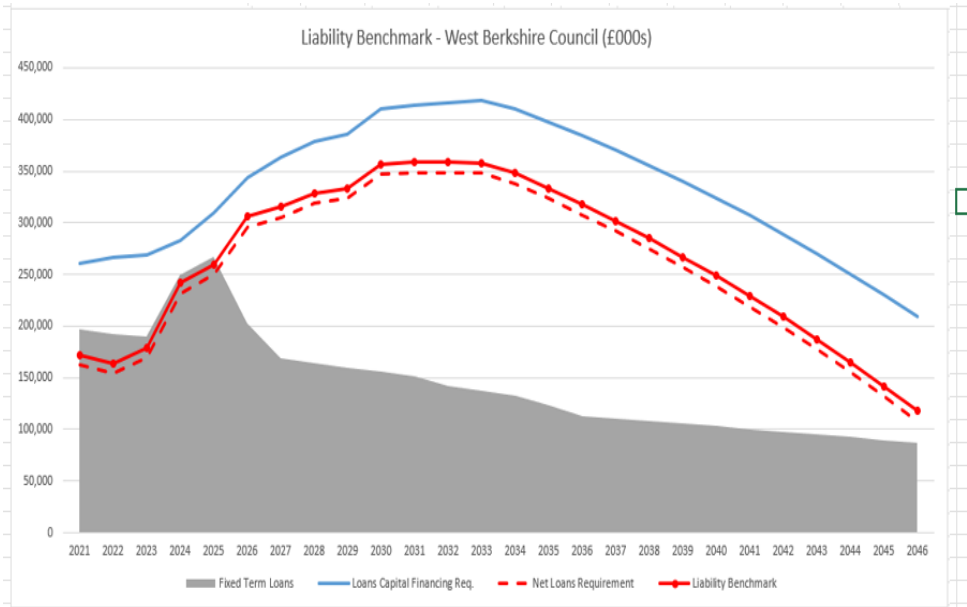
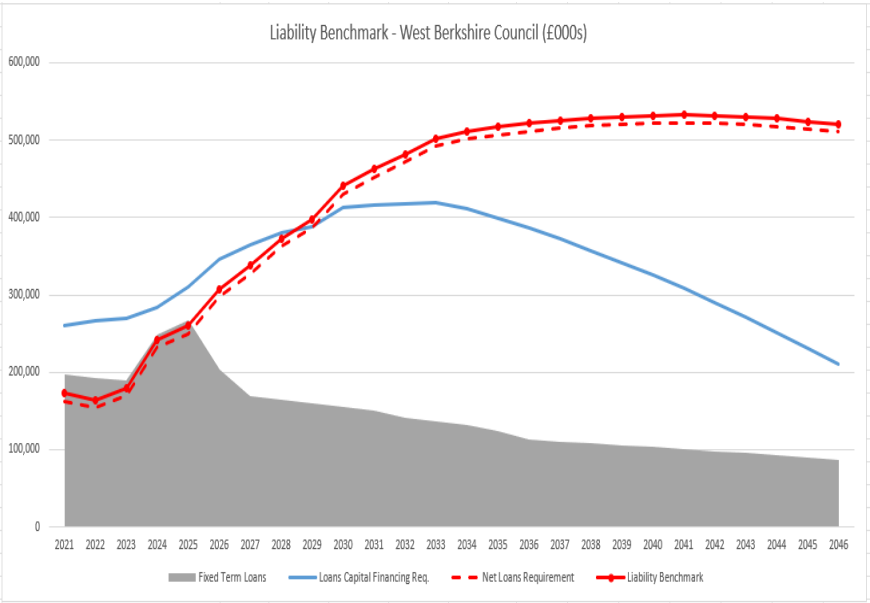
| Project Title | Service | Council Funded | External Funded | Total | Reasoning |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---|
| Four Houses Corner | Development & Hous | 88,000 | 0 | 88,000 | £88K to be re-profiled to 26/27 to cover contractual obligation retention for building defects |
| Electric Vehicle Charge Points | Environment | 0 | 750,000 | 750,000 | About to award a contract in summer 2025 and therefore the costs are forecasted to incur in next financial year |
| Theale Station Improvements | Environment | 0 | 3,369,560 | 3,369,560 | Potential to spend more but this may depend on GWR purchasing land, currently being considered. |
| Nutrient Neutrality | Environment | 0 | 1,800,000 | 1,800,000 | £2.4m is expected to run over 2 years through to March 2027. Profile will depend on opportunities to buy land. |
| Brookfields School - Accessibility | Education & SEND | 0 | 616,190 | 616,190 | Trust has only just confirmed for WBC to deliver project. Based on project development, Summer holiday has now been missed so anticipate that construction will commence Easter 2026. |
| Brookfields Expansion – Early Years and Key Stage 3 | Education & SEND | 0 | 863,870 | 863,870 | Expectation to go into construction this financial year. |
| Special Education Needs & Disabilities Infrastructure Delivery | Education & SEND | 0 | 472,250 | 472,250 | Development of SEND projects not sufficiently advanced to accurately predict spend at this point. |
| Renewable energy provision (solar farm) | Environment | 3,000,000 | 0 | 3,000,000 | Best estimate based on current programme but yet to have contractor on board which could influence programme further. |
| Thatcham Library - New Build | Community Services | 0 | 1,200,000 | 1,200,000 | Delays in identifying and purchasing land for build |
| Education Capital Enhancement Programme | Education & SEND | 0 | 247,410 | 247,410 | Problems with obtaining insurance and Property Staffing are impacting on delivering the programme. Property team has forecasted a a total £3.5m spend against approximately £3.8m |
| Total | | 3,088,000 | 9,319,280 | 12,407,280 | |

Quarter One: Budget Reconciliation

| Service | Budget | Forecast | Actual | Variance | Reprofile |
|---------------------------------|--------|----------|--------|----------|-----------|
| | £m | £m | £m | £m | £m |
| Adult Social Care | 2.99 | 2.33 | 0.13 | 0.66 | 0.00 |
| Children's Social Care | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Education & SEND | 15.65 | 13.00 | 1.09 | 2.64 | 2.26 |
| Development & Housing | 4.29 | 3.26 | 0.88 | 1.03 | 0.09 |
| Community Services | 8.72 | 7.40 | 1.39 | 1.33 | 1.25 |
| Environment | 55.18 | 46.54 | 5.29 | 8.64 | 8.92 |
| Finance, Property & Procurement | 3.24 | 3.04 | 0.32 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Transformation, Customer & ICT | 3.19 | 3.33 | 0.79 | (0.15) | 0.13 |
| | 93.26 | 78.91 | 9.88 | 14.35 | 12.65 |

Quarter One: Liability Benchmarks
Including DSG

Excluding DSG



2025/26 Revenue Financial Performance: Q1

| | |
|---|---|
| Committee considering report: | Executive |
| Date of Committee: | 25 September 2025 |
| Portfolio Member: | Councillor Iain Cottingham |
| Date Portfolio Member agreed report: | Issued to Cllr Iain Cottingham 08/09/2025 |
| Report Author: | Elizabeth Griffiths |

1 Purpose of the Report

To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. This report is Q1, the first report of the 2025/26 financial year. The report details the variance between the budget set in February 2025 and the current forecast of the year end position. This allows the Executive and Scrutiny Commission to consider the authority's current financial position.

2 The Executive are asked to note the following:

That the projected overspend at Q1 is £2.89m which nets to £681k after the application of transformation funding, and that although not shown on this table, the projected overspend on the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant is £14m

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

| Implication | Commentary |
|------------------------|---|
| Financial: | The general fund is currently approximately £10m, which is in excess of the recommended S151 level for 2025/26 but this has been achieved with the support of £13m of EFS. Any in year overspends will reduce the level of the general fund. It is also important to be able to demonstrate to MHCLG that we can accurately budget, forecast and deliver against our financial plans. |
| Human Resource: | None |
| Legal: | None |

| | | | | |
|--|--|----------------|-----------------|--|
| Risk Management: | <p>The Financial Review Panel (FRP) scrutinises all services performance against budget and financial risks.</p> <p>Preparation for the 2026/27 budget continues with services bringing forward proposals to Finance for review ahead of challenge by the Senior Leadership Team and then the Financial Savings and Planning Board (Budget Board).</p> | | | |
| Property: | Assets are under review by the Property Investment Board in order to identify potential disposals which would be financially beneficial. | | | |
| Policy: | | | | |
| | 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 | | |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | X | | The proposal aims to continue to protect those characteristics |
| Environmental Impact: | | X | | Unlikely to have any long-term environmental impact. |
| Health Impact: | | X | | |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | N/A |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | N/A |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | X | | All expenditure is aligned to the delivery of Council priorities, this report provides detail on the level of expenditure incurred. |
| Core Business: | | X | | |
| Data Impact: | | X | | N/A |
| Consultation and Engagement: | Service Directors, Executive Directors. | | | |

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The projected outturn position for 2025/26 at Q1 is an overspend of £681k against a net budget of £183.4m.
- 4.2 The position at Q1 is a projected £2.9m overspend on the 2025/26 budget but £2.21m of this relates to spend on transformation projects which will be funded from capital receipts, leaving an unfunded overspend of £681k. Business cases for new transformation projects delivering ongoing revenue savings will be presented to the Senior Leadership Team for review and challenge.
- 4.3 There are smaller over and underspends across the organisation but the main contributors to the £681k overspend are as follows:
- Adult Social Care (£470k) which is caused by a budgeted expectation that two care homes would have been sold by now so the ongoing running costs of them are not in the 2025/26 budget. The impact of this is £1.5m but due to an overachievement of savings and other positive variances, the net position has been mitigated by over a million pounds.
 - Children's Social Care (£532k) which is being driven by increased demand. This has reached levels significantly higher than expected.
 - Education & Send (£287k), created by underachievement against historic income and savings targets.

2025/26 Revenue Financial Performance: Q1

| | Revised Budget 2025/26 £ | Expenditure Variance for 2025/26 £ | Income Variance for 2025/26 £ | Net Variance £ |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Executive Director People - Adult Social Care & Pub. Health | 277,160 | -9,160 | 0 | -9,160 |
| Adult Social Care | 74,165,340 | 1,078,850 | -608,400 | 470,450 |
| Public Health & Wellbeing | -80,000 | -221,600 | 187,500 | -34,100 |
| | | | | |
| People - Adult Social Care & Public Health | 74,362,500 | 848,090 | -420,900 | 427,190 |
| | | | | |
| Executive Director People - Children's Services | 232,220 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Children's Social Care | 32,783,910 | 757,710 | -225,490 | 532,220 |
| Education & SEND | 8,855,560 | 61,770 | 225,940 | 287,710 |
| Education (DSG Funded) | -444,000 | 13,381,280 | -13,381,280 | 0 |
| | | | | |
| People - Children's Services | 41,427,690 | 14,200,760 | -13,380,830 | 819,930 |
| | | | | |
| Executive Director – Place | 232,290 | -1,840 | 0 | -1,840 |
| Community Services | 5,498,800 | 9,270 | 58,880 | 68,150 |
| Environment | 26,979,910 | 1,221,630 | -1,262,670 | -41,040 |
| Development & Housing | 3,637,700 | 1,983,000 | -1,952,850 | 30,150 |
| | | | | |
| Place | 36,348,700 | 3,212,060 | -3,156,640 | 55,420 |
| | | | | |
| Transformation, Customer & ICT | 3,474,230 | 3,240,850 | -317,700 | 2,923,150 |
| <i>Transformation funding applied</i> | | -2,209,310 | | -2,209,310 |
| Executive Director - Resources | 839,350 | 106,630 | -37,730 | 68,900 |
| Finance, Property & Procurement | 4,033,610 | -5,190,330 | 5,139,450 | -50,880 |
| Strategy & Governance | 5,515,130 | -8,360 | 162,350 | 153,990 |
| | | | | |
| Resources | 13,862,320 | -4,060,520 | 4,946,370 | 885,850 |
| | | | | |
| Chief Executive | 625,640 | -7,450 | 0 | -7,450 |
| | | | | |
| Chief Executive | 625,640 | -7,450 | 0 | -7,450 |
| | | | | |
| Capital Financing & Management | 16,815,200 | -1,499,880 | 0 | -1,499,880 |
| | | | | |
| Capital Financing and Management | 16,815,200 | -1,499,880 | 0 | -1,499,880 |
| | | | | |
| Total | 183,442,050 | 12,693,060 | -12,012,000 | 681,060 |

- Transformation, Customer & ICT (£734k). This is made up of some savings in areas like ICT on vacant posts but a significant shortfall (£921k) due to delays in the delivery of budgeted savings from transformation projects. This forecast and the potential mitigations of it were the subject of the finance review panel (FRP) on the 17th of July. Further investigations are required on the current forecast transformation savings projections to determine timing, quantum and deliverability.
- Savings of £1.5m on Capital Financing costs achieved thanks to a strategy of short term borrowing, operating within our maturity framework.

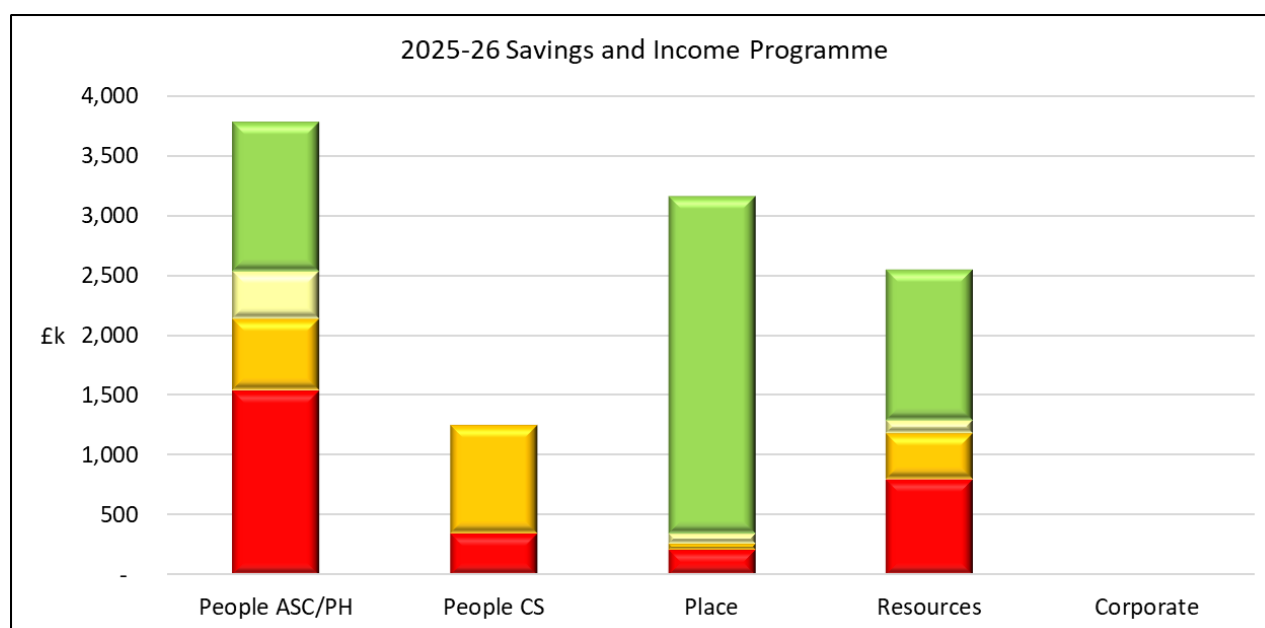
4.4 The extension of the statutory override on the recognition of deficits in the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) means that the impact of it is not shown on the table below. The cumulative deficit at the end of 2024/25 was £16m. If the current estimated overspend for 2025/26 remains unmitigated, this would be added to the cumulative balance (projected £30m at the of 2025/26). As reported to the School's Forum on the 15th of July, no current mitigations are in place for this overspend and any other overspends within the DSG will increase that figure.

5 Budgeted savings

- 5.1 Roughly half of the budgeted savings for 2025/26 are on track to be delivered with just under a quarter currently showing as ragged red.
- 5.2 The main drivers of this are the unachieved savings on the care homes in Adult Social Care, the commissioning savings in Children's Social Care – which have been delayed – and the TVI transformation savings in Resources.

| 2025-26 | Red | Amber | Yellow | Green | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| | £k | £k | £k | £k | £k |
| People ASC/PH | 1,535 | 597 | 395 | 1,255 | 3,782 |
| People CS | 346 | 905 | - | - | 1,251 |
| Place | 211 | 56 | 85 | 2,808 | 3,160 |
| Resources | 800 | 377 | 110 | 1,257 | 2,544 |
| Corporate | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 2,892 | 1,936 | 590 | 5,320 | 10,737 |
| % | 27% | 18% | 5% | 50% | 100% |

- 5.3 The proportion of savings either delivered or forecast as being deliverable vs those deemed higher risk is shown below.



5.4 The key to savings is as follows:

- Green – on track, either already delivered or no forecast issues with delivery
- Yellow – on track, forecast to be delivered in year but some issues or dependencies still to be resolved
- Amber – concerns over delivery, actions required to be implemented, needs to be closely monitored
- Red – highly unlikely to be delivered this year, actions not yet identified, forecast as a pressure in budget monitoring

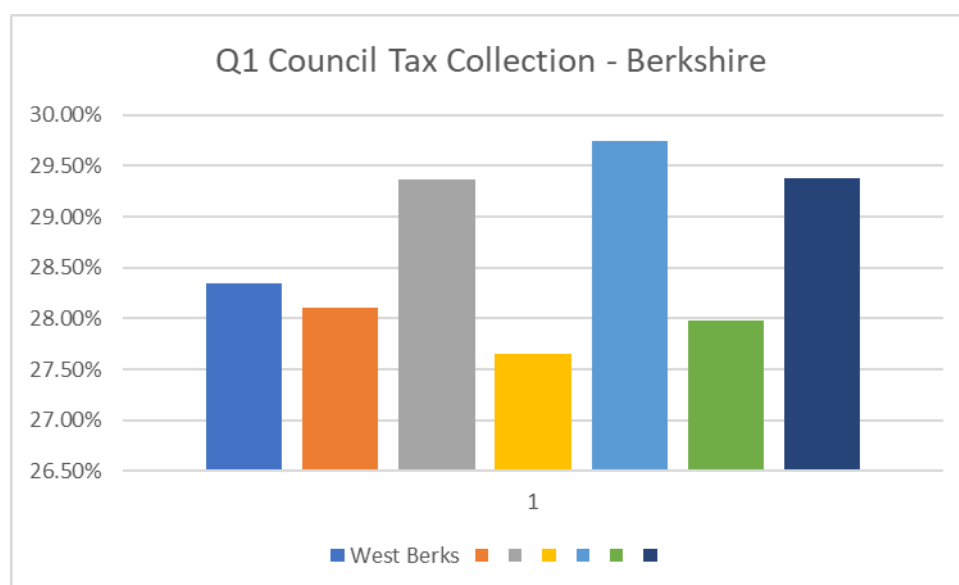
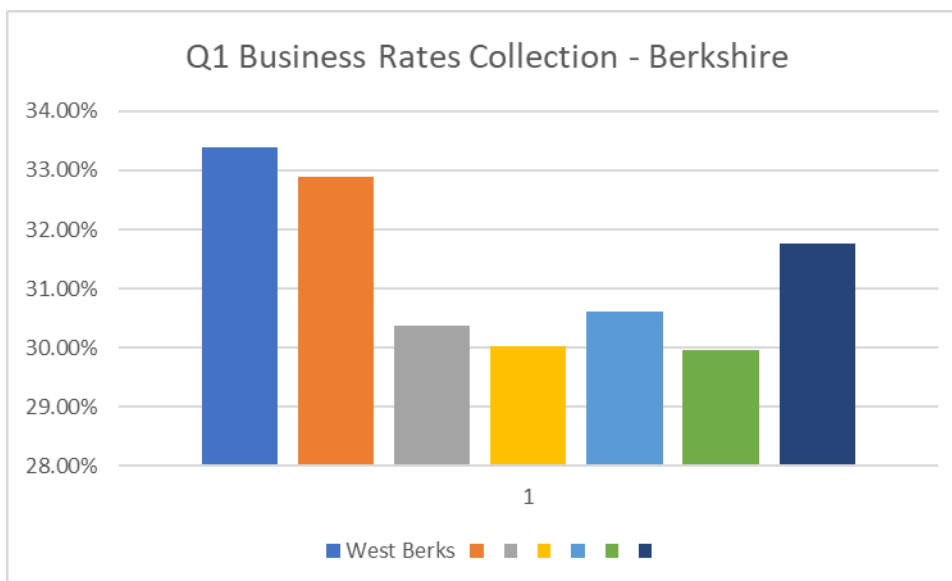
A new category will be introduced at Q2 showing delayed savings which can't be delivered in the current year but are expected to be delivered in the next financial year.

6 Council Tax and Business Rates

6.1 Q1 Collection rates are strong showing only a very slight drop vs last year.

| | 2025/26 - Q1 | | | Comparison to prior year |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | Total (£) | Collected (£) | % collected | |
| Council Tax | 109,644,456 | 36,604,206 | 33.38% | -0.03% |
| Business Rates | 161,366,863 | 45,743,004 | 28.35% | -0.10% |

6.2 The percentage of the total annual business rates and council tax collected at Q1 by West Berks vs other Berkshire authorities is shown in the graphs below.



7 Conclusion

7.1 The Q1 forecast shows some key areas of concern against a budget that was already set with £3m of EFS funding. The pressures in ASC are being mitigated by underspends and additional savings elsewhere within that service whilst pressures elsewhere are being offset at least in part by the significant projected underspend in capital financing costs. Of the £10.7m pounds of savings budgeted, almost half of those are ragged as being in doubt. Any savings not realised will become an additional budget pressure for next year.

- 7.2 The concerns highlighted by the Q1 report are being addressed swiftly to ensure that any mitigation possible is achieved by year end.
- 7.3 The budgeting process for 2026/27 is underway with the first savings proposals from Adult Social Care already reviewed by Senior Leadership Team ahead of review by the Budget Board on the 31st of July.
- 7.4 Any variances to budget identified in this and subsequent quarterly reports, if ongoing in nature, will add to the budget gap already identified in the 2026/27 budget and MTFS.

Proposals

None.

8 Other options considered

None.

9 Appendices

None.

Background Papers:

Quarter One, Two and Three Revenue Reports

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by a Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Task Group within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Officer details:

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Document Control

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|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Document Ref: | 1 | Date Created: | |
| Version: | 1 | Date Modified: | 08/09/2025 |
| Author: | Elizabeth Griffiths | | |
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Change History

| Version | Date | Description | Change ID |
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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 Carolyn Culver |
| Date Task & Finish Group agreed report: | 30 July 2025 |
| Report Author: | Councillor Carolyn 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. |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Legal: | <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> | | | |
| Risk Management: | <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> | | | |
| Property: | <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> | | | |
| Policy: | <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> | | | |
| | 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. |
| B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users? | | X | | The proposed decision does not have any impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics. |
| Environmental Impact: | | X | | There are no environmental impacts arising directly from this report. |
| Health Impact: | | X | | 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. |
| ICT Impact: | | X | | There are no ICT impacts arising directly from this report. |
| Digital Services Impact: | | X | | There are no impacts for Digital Services arising directly from this report. |
| Council Strategy Priorities: | | X | | 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 |

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|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| | | | | 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.

- (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

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 |
| Objective Four: To determine whether reliable and consistent advice was given to members about the project to assist them in their decision-making roles | | |
| 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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| Document Ref: | | Date Created: | |
| Version: | | Date Modified: | |
| Author: | | | |
| Owning Service | | | |

Change History

| Version | Date | Description | Change ID |
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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.

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 RAID 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 RAID 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 timeline

Playing Pitch Strategy adopted – February 2020

Number one priority is Faraday Road and relocation thereof
'Proposed mitigation [for Faraday Road] is a combination of a new 3G pitch at Newbury Sports Hub / Newbury RFC site, replacing one grass rugby pitch used by the rugby club with a 3G pitch capable of accommodating non-contact rugby training and football use for matches and training. Additional mitigation is provision of a grass pitch or pitches at one or more sites.'



LRIE Task and Finish group reported – 28 July 2020

Recommendations include improving project management.



Appeal for Newspaper House (to build flats) dismissed – 8 October 2020

Dismissed on flooding grounds. Planning application 19/01281/OUTMAJ. Western Area Planning Committee rejected application Wednesday 5 February.



Executive – 14 January 2021

Determines to proceed negotiations with Newbury Rugby Club



Public consultation March-April 2021



Executive decision EX4010 – 29 April 2021

'We have committed to a project by virtue of the approved Playing Pitch Strategy (jointly with Sport England (SE) and sport governing bodies)' and 'The process has focussed on meeting the requirements of the Playing Pitch Strategy'



WBC delegated authority to Alliance – April 2021

To enter agreement with rugby club to take lease of land to provide a 3G pitch



Sports Hub business case – 23 May 2021



Joint statement between WBC and Sport England – July 2021

"... we are jointly supporting the development of proposals at Newbury Rugby Club as an enhanced replacement to meet the community's needs for Faraday Road Stadium, in line with the Playing Pitch Strategy."



Sport England consultation responses – 4 October and 12 November 2021

The first one, dated 4 October 2021, was an 'objection', if the scheme was to be treated as a replacement for Faraday Road. Consultation response two, dated 12 November 2021, was 'no objection' if the scheme was to be treated as stand-alone.



Sports Hub project board – 9 November 2021

Minutes stated 'Corporate Board also wanted the narrative of the project strengthened more to link in with the PPS. [Officers] to look at extracting the benefits and creating a stronger link to the PPS.'



Western Area Planning Committee – 15 December 2021

Page 44 of the agenda pack: '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 said: '...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.'



Executive decision EX4149 – 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).' '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.'



Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission – 25 January 2022

Upheld the decision of the Executive to award the contract. At 1:4:45 in the recording chairman Cllr Law says, 'I understand it to be a replacement for the pitch'.



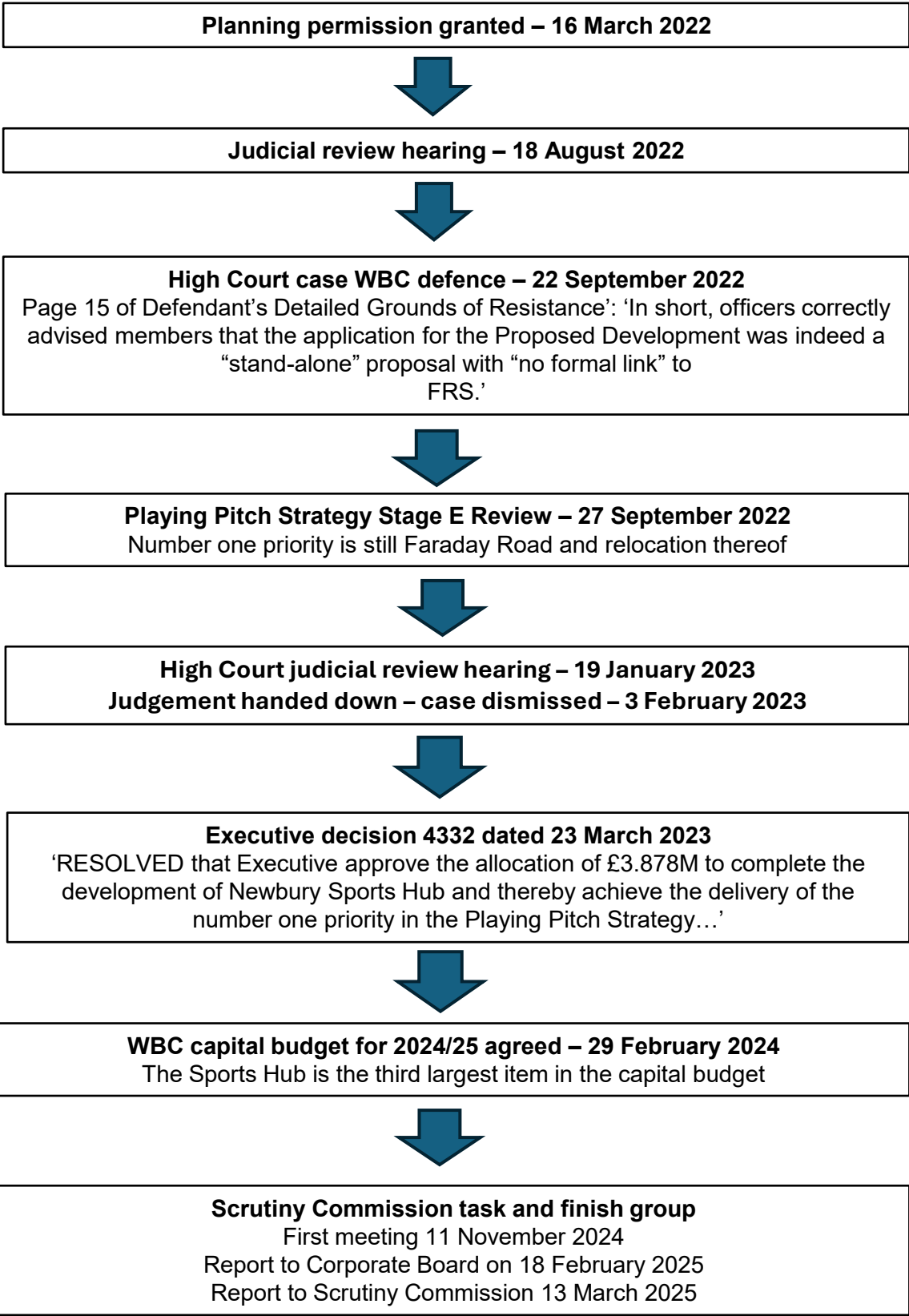
Intention of claimant to make legal challenge – 31 January 2022

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 website on 4 February 2022.



District Planning Committee – 2 March 2022

Page 20 of the agenda pack: '... 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' and '... members are advised that this application should be determined on its individual planning merits.'



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Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2025

Item 10b – Project Management Task and Finish Group Update

Verbal Item

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Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee
16 September 2025

Item 11 – Appointment of Task and Finish Groups

Verbal Item

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The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

1. This document gives 28 clear days notice of key decisions which the Executive and Individual Executive Members or Officer expect to take.
2. The document is updated as required and is available to the public on the Council's website.
3. The Executive is made up of the Executive Leader, Deputy Leader and eight Executive Members with the following portfolios:

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications | Councillor Jeff Brooks |
| Deputy Leader and Executive Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services | Councillor Heather Codling |
| Adult Social Care and Public Health | Councillor Patrick Clark |
| Finance and Resources | Councillor Iain Cottingham |
| Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside | Councillor Nigel Foot |
| Planning and Housing | Councillor Denise Gaines |
| Environment and Highways | Councillor Stuart Gourley |
| Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) | Councillor Tom McCann |
| Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation | Councillor Justin Pemberton |
| Transformation and Corporate Programme | Councillor Vicky Poole |

4. Key decisions are those executive decisions which are likely to result in spending or savings which are "significant" in relation to the budget for the service or function in question, or in terms of the effect on communities living or working in two or more wards or electoral divisions. All contracts above £500,000 require a key decision in accordance with the Constitution.
5. The Regulations and the Council's Constitution provide for urgent key decisions to be made, even though they have not been included in this document in accordance with General Exception and Special Urgency provisions.
6. The Forward Plan will also contain details of intended review activity by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission and its Sub-Committee(s) or another body e.g. Task Group associated with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission.
7. Copies of the Council's Constitution and agenda and minutes for all meetings of the Council may be accessed on the Council's website.
8. For copies of reports or other documents, and for detailed information regarding specific issues to be considered by the Executive, individual Member or officer please contact the named Lead Officer for the item concerned.
9. For further details on the time of meetings and general information about the Plan please email executivecycle@westberkshire.gov.uk or by writing to the address below.

Publication Date: 1 September 2025

Nicola Thomas
Service Lead
Legal & Democratic Services
West Berkshire Council, Council Offices
Market Street
Newbury
RG14 5LD

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 25 Sep 2025 | Youth Justice Annual Plan | | No | Executive | | | Dave Wraight | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Care Leaver Annual Report | | No | Executive | | | Karl Davis | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Revenue Financial Performance Report - Q1 of 2025/26 | To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and provide a year-end forecast. | Yes | Executive | | | Elizabeth Griffiths | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | ASC Annual Report | | No | Executive | | | Melanie O'Rourke | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Early Help Response Hub Annual report | | No | Executive | | | Karen Atalla | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Faraday Road 3G Pitch Development | To approve the inclusion of a 3G pitch at Faraday Rd in the Council's Capital Programme. | Yes | Executive | No statutory consultation needed. Discussion has taken place with football groups and will be subject to the | | Jon Winstanley | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | | | | recommendations in the Playing Pitch Strategy refresh. | | | |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Section 20 Payment Policy | To introduce a Section 20 Parental Contribution Procedure | Yes | Executive | | | Rebecca Wilshire | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Capital Financial Performance Report Q1 2025/26 | To present the Q1 capital financial performance for Members to note. | Yes | Executive | | | Shail Vitish | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Parking Delivery Plan 2024-2034 | To approve and adopt the Council's Parking Strategy | No | Executive | | | Emma Jameson | Open |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Contracts for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive | To gain approval from Executive to delegate authority to an individual (Service Lead or Service Director) to | Yes | Executive | | | Sarah Wood | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | proceed with contract awards with a value in excess of £2.5M | | | | | | |
| 25 Sep 2025 | Standing item: Asset Disposal | | No | Executive | | | Richard Turner | Open |
| 24 Oct 2025 | Winter Service Plan 2025/26 | To approve the Winter Service Plan 2025/26 | Yes | Portfolio Holder: Environment and Highways | Consultation with Ward Members, Town/ Parish Councils and consideration of comments received, including comments from members of the public during the previous winter service season. | | Andrew Reynolds | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | 2025/26 Performance Report Q1 | | No | Executive | | | Beatriz Teixeira | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Corporate | | No | Executive | | | Karl Davis | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|---|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | Parenting Panel Annual Report | | | | | | | |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Ridgeway Council Formal Proposal | | Yes | Executive | | | Sarah Clarke | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) | To share proposed measures set out in the Council's emerging Rights of Way Improvement Plan with decision makers and request approval to publish. | Yes | Executive | | | Kofi Adu-Gyamfi | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Quarterly Financial Performance Report - Q2 of 2025/26 | To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and provide a year- | No | Executive | | | Toby Bradley | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | end forecast. | | | | | | |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Director of Public Health Annual Report | | Yes | Executive | | | Dr Matt Pearce | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Update on the PPP shared service contract | To fulfil the requirement of the IAA which is due to expire in January 2027, which requires the partner authorities to review the current arrangements and adopt any changes 2 years before the current arrangement expires. | No | Executive | | | Sean Murphy | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Annual Report of the Shared Building Control Service | To provide and update on the performance of the shared building control service. | No | Executive | | | Sean Murphy | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Standing item: | | No | Executive | | | Richard | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|---|---------|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | Asset Disposal | | | | | | Turner | |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task Group Recommendations | | No | Executive | | | Steven Bow | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | The Enforcement Plan | | Yes | Executive | | | Laura Callan | Open |
| 6 Nov 2025 | Finance, Property and Procurement resource allocation | | No | Executive | | | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Fully exempt Information relating to any individual. |
| 18 Dec 2025 | 2025/26 Performance Report Q2 | | No | Executive | | | Beatriz Teixeira | Open |
| 18 Dec 2025 | Standing item: Asset Disposal | | No | Executive | | | Richard Turner | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|--|--|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 12 Feb 2026 | Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2026-27 | | Yes | Executive | | | Shail Vitish | Open |
| 12 Feb 2026 | Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 | | Yes | Executive | | | Shail Vitish | Open |
| 12 Feb 2026 | Revenue Budget 2026/27 | | Yes | Executive | | | Elizabeth Griffiths | Open |
| 12 Feb 2026 | Quarterly Financial Performance Report - Q3 of 2025/26 | To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets and provide a year-end forecast. | Yes | Executive | | | Toby Bradley | Open |
| 12 Feb 2026 | Capital Budget 2026/27 | | Yes | Executive | | | Richard Quayle | Open |
| 12 Feb 2026 | Playing Pitch Strategy | | Yes | Executive | | | Jude Thomas | Open |

| Decision Due Date | Title | Purpose | Key Decision e.g. Yes/ No | Decision Maker e.g. Executive Individual Decision Officer decision | Consultation e.g. Members including shadow exec members | Background Papers (All Papers are available for inspection via the Lead Officer) | Lead Officer e.g report author | Report likely to be considered in private (i.e., it contains confidential or exempt information) |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------|--|
| 12 Feb 2026 | Henwick Worthy Masterplan | | Yes | Executive | | | Jude Thomas | Open |
| | Care Leavers Council Tax Amendment | | Yes | Portfolio Holder: Finance and Resources | | | Sadie Owen | Open |

| Resources & Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme | | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Item | | Scrutiny Theme | Purpose | Lead Officer | Portfolio Holder/ Lead Member | Pre or post decision? |
| 01/10/2025 (Ridgeway Special) | | | | | | |
| | Ridgeway Council Proposal | | | Sarah Clarke | Cllr Jeff Brooks (Leader, Strategy and Communications) | Pre-decision |
| | Briefing note on Social Housing | | | Nick Caprara | Cllr Denise Gaines (Planning and Housing) | Scrutiny Committee Decision |
| 25 November 2025 | | | | | | |
| | Community Safety | Partnership Effectiveness | Meeting in its capacity as West Berkshire Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, to receive a presentation from the Building Communities Together Partnership. | C/Supt Felicity Parker/ Joseph Holmes | Cllr Justin Pemberton (Public Safety and Community Engagement) | Scrutiny Committee Decision |
| | Social Housing | | | Nick Caprara | Cllr Denise Gaines (Planning and Housing) | Scrutiny Committee Decision |
| 10 February 2026 (Budget Scrutiny) | | | | | | |
| | Medium Term Financial Strategy | Corporate Effectiveness | To set out the financial planning assumptions for future years and how these align these with the Council Strategy to ensure that the Council Strategy will be delivered. The MTFs highlights the overarching key issues facing the Council's finances as well as how there are many different scenarios and uncertainty concerning the future revenue streams for the Council in the future. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |
| | Investment and Borrowing Strategy 2025/26 | Corporate Effectiveness | To consolidate the investments and borrowing strategy for the year ahead by detailing how and where the Council will invest and borrow in the forthcoming year, within a particular framework. This strategy is monitored throughout the year, with a mid-year report going to the Government and Ethics Committee as well as an annual report being presented to Members. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |

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|-------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| | Capital Strategy. Financial Years 2025/26 to 2034/35 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To outline the Capital Strategy covering financial years 2025/26 to 2034/35 and the supporting funding framework, providing a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |
| | Revenue Budget 2025/26 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To review the budget proposals for the year ahead that form the basis of the 2024-25 revenue budget and detail the respective Council Tax proposals and resolutions. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |
| | Revenue Performance Report Q3 2023/24 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | To report on the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |
| | Capital Financing Performance Report Q3 2023/24 | <i>Corporate Effectiveness</i> | Reports on the under or over spends against the Council's approved capital budget. | Shannon Coleman-Slaughter | Cllr Iain Cottingham (Finance and Resources) | Pre-decision |
| 17 March 2026 | | | | | | |
| | Pedestrianisation | | | | | |
| | Waste Strategy | | | | | |
| To Be Programmed | | | | | | |
| | Thames Water and The Environment Agency | <i>Partnership Effectiveness</i> | To understand how Thames Water is investing in its networks to support planned development and manage pollution incidents in West Berkshire and how the Environment Agency is holding the water company to account. | TBC | N/A | Scrutiny Committee Decision |
| | Playing Pitch Strategy | | | | | |

Council Strategy Priorities

- Services We Are Proud Of
- A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All
- Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency
- A Prosperous and Resilient West Berkshire
- Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice

Scrutiny Themes

- Policy Effectiveness
- Corporate Effectiveness
- Partnership Effectiveness

Last updated:

07 September 2025