

RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Carolyne Culver (Chairman), Ross Mackinnon (Vice-Chairman), Erik Pattenden, Christopher Read, Richard Somner and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Councillor Laura Coyle (attending remotely), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Nick Caprara (Service Lead - Housing), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Alex O'Connor (Partnership Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator) and Vicky Phoenix (Principal Policy Officer - Scrutiny)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Antony Amirtharaj, Councillor Jeremy Cottam and Councillor Alan Macro

PART I

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Item 10 – Sports Hub Task and Finish Group Report – page 15 (final sentence of paragraph 10)

Councillor Culver clarified the Task Group view that, in cases where the Council was the sponsor of a project, Executive Members should **only** speak to the item at a planning committee **as the project sponsor. Executive Members should not participate in the debate or vote on the item.**

2 Actions from previous meetings

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

- **116/143** – These actions arose from a special scrutiny meeting with Thames Water and the Environment Agency and were over a year old. It was agreed that the Committee would request a written update for the Newbury Clay Hill Flood and Drainage Warden.
- **237** – Councillor Cottingham to be chased for a response.
- **239** – The Policy Development Group had met to discuss Viable Villages and would be looking at Transformation. It was noted that the meeting had not taken place on 20 November.
- **246** – Comments were awaited from Councillor Martha Vickers in relation to the work of task and finish groups.
- **247** – It was agreed that this would be done as part of the Transformation review.
- **250** – It was agreed that this action could be closed.
- **253** – Officers to follow up on the request for the Solar Farm Business Case.
- **254** – A response was awaited regarding a finance briefing.

It was agreed that previous recommendations to Executive would be added to the tracker.

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Action: Update the tracker with previous recommendations from the Sports Hub and Customer Journey Task Groups.

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

4 Petitions

There were no petitions received at the meeting.

5 Community Safety Partnership Update

Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive) and Superintendent Colin Hudson (Thames Valley Police (TVP)) presented the Community Safety Partnership Update (Agenda Item 6). The presentation could be accessed here:

https://youtu.be/aDHDdoW76ik?list=PL6cepKKEIwne9h0GajvDRG65M2AG0Wn_U&t=557.

The following points were raised in the debate:

- It was confirmed that a 'positive outcome' was where a suspect was charged.
- The relationship between the Police and the Crown Prosecution System was good at a senior level, but it varied on a case-by-case basis at the local level, and the Police felt that they were sometimes asked to hit a high threshold for a criminal charge and capacity was not always sufficient to meet the demand for evidence.
- It was thought that ethnicity categories for stop and search were self-defined, but Supt Hudson undertook to confirm and report back.

Action: TVP to confirm whether ethnicity categories were self-defined for stop and search.

- It was confirmed that the majority of violence against women and girls was perpetrated by males.
- Members asked about how the Police dealt with rural crime. It was explained that a task in coordination group had been formed where partners came together to talk about local issues in the community. Rural crime was reflected as a priority in these meetings. Several rural crime spots in West Berkshire had been prioritised over the last summer with patrols, general engagement events and specific rural crime events. It was thought that rural crime was under-reported. It was recognised that the financial cost of acquisitive crime in rural areas was more significant than in towns. Rural crime would continue to be prioritised.
- It was suggested that it may be useful to show crime rates per 10,000 population to facilitate comparison with other local authorities. TVP confirmed that West Berkshire was within the top quartile for low crime rates. They did not currently have the analytical tools/capacity to be able to routinely report on that basis, but offered to see if there were other data sets already in the public domain that would provide this information.

Action: TVP to investigate whether crime rates per 10,000 population could be provided for next year's presentation.

- Members asked if the Safer Streets initiative would be continued in The Nightingales and if it would be rolled out to other areas. Officers indicated that this was initially funded by central government. It was confirmed that work would continue in the

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Nightingales once current funding ceased. Similar partnership approaches could be rolled out in other areas, but some measures would be subject to successful bidding in future funding rounds.

- There was discussion about what would happen following the abolition of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in 2028. Powers and funding would transfer to the mayor of the relevant strategic authority. Areas without a mayor would revert to Police Authority arrangements that pre-dated the OPCC, which would have representation from constituent local authorities.
- Concerns were expressed about problems with drugs in Lambourn. TVP confirmed that stop and search powers were often used to look for drugs, and drugs were often found (not solely in Lambourn). Discussions specific to Lambourn had taken place at the most recent meeting of the Community Safety Partnership, and the Ward Member would be involved with further developments.
- Members queried the action that could be taken in instances of anti-social behaviour (asb). Asb concerns could persist over a long period of time. Supt Hudson felt this was an area on which partners could work more closely together, as it was not straightforward for TVP to take action independently. Supt Hudson offered Members his own contact details should they want to escalate an ongoing and long term asb issue.

Councillor Carolyne Culver asked the presenters to comment on ways partnership working could be improved:

- There was consensus on the importance of sharing data at the earliest possible stage. This would help to identify actions that could be taken in specific localities. It was felt that a greater impact could be achieved by focusing on particular areas.
- It was also important to have a greater awareness of the data held amongst partner agencies.
- Some partners needed to be encouraged to participate more fully.

Councillor Culver raised a concern that the loss of the OPCC could result in existing funding/grants not being accessed. She felt this was an area on which Members could lobby Government. Mr Holmes agreed this was a potential risk and lobbying could be useful once the Government's position beyond having an OPCC was clear.

Councillor Culver commented that this was a very useful annual item. She gave thanks on behalf of Members for the ongoing work of the Community Safety Partnership.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6 Options for improving Affordable Housing Delivery

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 7) which described the options available to the Council for the delivery of additional social housing with the aim of achieving the target of delivering 1,000 units of social housing by 2030. The report also outlined several issues which had arisen which directly impacted upon the traditional mode of delivery for affordable housing locally and nationally.

Councillor Denise Gaines (Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing) presented the report. She stated that affordable housing was defined by the charity Shelter as being the provision of decent, safe and secure homes.

The provision of affordable housing was a high priority for the Council. There was awareness of the difficulties faced by residents in getting on the housing ladder in a high

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cost area, and therefore the need for affordable housing provision. 1300 applications for social housing were currently on the Common Housing Register. Some of these were families in particular need.

The Council had a target of providing 1,000 affordable homes by 2030. 538 had been provided at Q2 in 2023. However, new Government requirements meant that targets would need to increase.

Information was presented on the number of affordable housing completions by tenure type and by Registered Provider (RP).

It was the case that there were limited development opportunities across West Berkshire. Key issues for West Berkshire also included:

- RPs focusing their financial resources on improving and retrofitting their existing stock to meet the Decent Homes Standards, energy efficiency targets and regulatory requirements to invest in their stock.
- Viability issues were presenting a significant barrier to RPs providing schemes. Increased construction costs, material shortages and rising labour costs had all detrimentally impacted the viability of new build schemes.
- RPs not willing to invest in schemes that did not deliver significant scale.
- RPs unable to agree to the specification of units with developers and refusing to purchase as RPs sought to future proof their acquisitions in anticipation of building regulation changes meaning they were only looking for s106 properties that exceeded current standards.
- RPs unwilling to secure s106 affordable housing unless a Designated Protected Area (DPA) waiver was agreed for schemes in rural areas to allow shared ownership units to be staircased up to 100%.
- Developers requiring more flexible s106 clauses with cascade mechanisms to allow for alternatives and avoid the need to vary s106s.

There were however future opportunities and they included:

- A framework agreement to help facilitate affordable housing delivery.
- A key deliverable of the Berkshire wide Prosperity Board was affordable housing.
- Potential partnership opportunities through the emerging Local Government Reorganisation.
- The need to consider variations to s106 Agreements in cases where viability issues raised by developers had been clearly evidenced.
- Greater acceptance of commuted sums, in the absence of an affordable housing contribution. To date, the Council had been focused on obtaining affordable housing on site.
- Petitioning the Government through MPs. Discussions had been held in this regard with Lee Dillon MP, who was on the relevant Government Select Committee.

A presentation was provided to Members by the representatives from Sovereign Network Group (SNG). Those attending were Ruari Laidlaw (Strategic Asset Management Director), Luke Bingham (Customer and Neighbourhood Director), Becky Morgan (Regional Director Localities), and Jenny Grote (Land and New Business Director – South). The following points were highlighted below (the full presentation could be accessed here:

https://youtu.be/aDHDdoW76ik?list=PL6cepKKElwne9h0GajvDRG65M2AG0Wn_U&t=4479)

- The three key workstreams were retrofit, regeneration, and dispose/replace. Homes were placed into the relevant category according to a dashboard model.

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- Retrofit properties included those with a pathway to achieving net zero.
- Homes identified for regeneration were located within areas of a high social value.
- A decision to dispose of a property was not taken lightly and was subject to rigorous scrutiny. Where disposal was the decision, the capital receipt was reinvested into other work streams.
- It was the ambition of SNG to provide as many high quality affordable and social rent properties as possible.

The slides would be circulated to the Committee and Members afforded the opportunity to raise queries on the presentation as it was not provided in advance.

A lengthy question and answer session followed, and the following points and comments were made:

- Members sought to understand whether SNG would reinvest the capital receipt from disposals into the same area of the District. Mr Bingham explained that efforts would be made to replace homes within the local authority area. It was not always possible to replace homes in the same precise area.
- Members were concerned that homes were not being replaced in the same area, making it difficult for people to stay living in their local area. Mr Laidlaw explained that it was always the preference to retrofit or regenerate existing homes. However, if a home became obsolete then disposal would take place and the capital would be recycled.
- Ms Grote advised of areas where new homes had been/were being built (Windmill Court in Mortimer and Paradise Way in Chapel Row) being two examples. However, it was not financially viable to replace standalone properties. Mr Bingham added that requirements to achieve net zero meant that some locations were less feasible.
- Nick Caprara (Housing Service Lead) explained that the Windmill Court development was a partnership effort between the Council and SNG. While there was a net loss of affordable housing units, the site had been largely obsolete and all homes on the site were affordable/social housing.
- The length of time it took from the start of a process in identifying a site to new homes being lived in was queried as were any obstacles in doing so. Ms Grote acknowledged there were challenges and felt this could be improved by working more closely with the Council. She referenced the need to vary s106 agreements as one example where improvements could be made by SNG and the Council, with the time taken to resolve legal matters. Councillor Gaines commented that there had been numerous issues to resolve with Windmill Court, including covenants in place on the land, the removal of which would have been detrimental to the Council. This was an area where the two parties had needed to work together to resolve.
- It was commented that residents had benefited from being issued with heat pumps for their properties.
- Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the recommendations in the report, one of which was to continue engaging with the local MP. He queried why both of West Berkshire's MPs were not being lobbied. Councillor Gaines explained that Lee Dillon, MP for Newbury, was being engaged with as he sat on the Government's Housing Select Committee and was therefore ideally placed. However, Councillor Gaines agreed that lobbying would be extended to include Olivia Bailey, MP for Reading West and Mid-Berkshire.
- Mr Laidlaw confirmed that there would be close liaison with those residents whose homes had been identified for retrofit/regeneration.

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- Plans to regenerate two specific buildings within the Nightingales Estate in the Newbury Greenham Ward were described. Councillor Erik Pattenden requested that he and other Ward Members be engaged with on developments.
- Members voiced concern that viability for the inclusion of affordable housing in a scheme was often raised as a concern by developers. This was regularly the case at planning committees. It was also often the case that a planning application would be approved by a planning committee, but developers then sought to amend planning conditions and the original decision made at planning was not always adhered to.
- Development in more deprived areas was discussed. Investment was needed in these areas, but it was important to ensure that areas of high deprivation were not worsened.
- The option of accepting commuted sums was a particular concern for Members, with no guarantee that the sum obtained would be used for development in the area concerned. This could particularly impact on areas of deprivation.
- Councillor Gaines was not supportive of commuted sums, but stated that it was an option to take into consideration if no affordable homes could be provided on a site. Clare Lawrence (Executive Director for Place) explained that commuted sums was one of a number of tools that could be utilised in the delivery of affordable homes and a level of flexibility was needed to achieve some form of affordable housing in cases where it could not be provided on site. This was a challenging area and the issues being experienced were sometimes outside of the Council's control.
- The comment was made that the management of smaller sites were challenging for RPs to manage. Ms Grote explained that SNG had a finite set of resources available. West Berkshire was a high priority area for SNG with much stock held in the area and was an area they wanted to invest in. However, resource limitations made it difficult to manage smaller sites, particularly those in more isolated locations. SNG could access Government funding to assist with some projects. A new Government funding programme for affordable/social housing was due to commence in February 2026. SNG would be submitting bids for this funding.
- Councillor Richard Somner agreed that a degree of flexibility should be employed during pre-application work. However, this should not come after a decision had been made on a planning application. If the different options/tools were to be taken forward then Planning Members would need to be made aware through training. This would be requested for inclusion in planning training when appropriate.
- Ms Morgan would provide a dedicated e-mail address that Members could use to raise any queries.
- The positive work of Connecting Communities in Berkshire was referred to. This included discussions on rural exception sites. It was noted that the Policy Development Group had been discussing viable villages and had formed a sub-group to look at affordable housing. This work would include looking at existing policy requirements. Connecting Communities in Berkshire would be invited to join this work. All Members should be made aware of the work of this organisation.
- It was noted that the lack of settlement boundaries could be restrictive to identifying areas for development.
- The suggestion was made that almshouses could be a wider consideration for affordable housing, this could be taken forward with the Chair of the Almshouse Association. Councillor Gaines agreed this could be explored. Mr Caprara explained that he was in discussion with the Chair of the Lambourn Junction Community Interest Company with regard to having new almshouses in that area.
- The suggestion of greater flexibility with s106 agreements was a concern for Members as it could result in requirements being avoided by developers. Linked to

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this was the concern, referenced in the report, of waivers being sought for a DPA. Ms Grote explained that this was sought to allow for shared ownership properties.

- The potential for the Council to own more properties was raised with the number managed to ensure this did not result in the Council needing to form its own housing company. This would be an option enabling the Council to directly assist some residents. The threshold was 199 properties. Councillor Gaines advised that 27 units had been purchased in the past two years using Council and Government funding. She would like to increase the number as this would give greater flexibility to the Council.
- Targets to 2030 had been noted, but the targets for the Local Plan period (to 2041) were requested. This figure would be confirmed to the Committee.
- It was noted that during the time taken between permission being granted and a scheme being built out, standards could change. New carbon neutral requirements introduced in 2025 was an example of this.
- The situation with a particular site (Newbury House on the Andover Road, Newbury) was queried. Planning permission had been granted for affordable housing but the site had been sold by SNG. Mr Laidlaw agreed to explore this matter and report back to the Committee.
- Councillor Carolyn Culver felt it would be useful for a forward plan to be in place for identified affordable/social housing units. Ms Lawrence explained that information could be provided on specific projects, but there was not a set pipeline of units becoming available. The Council often had to be reactive to possibilities as they became available. Councillor Culver requested the information on specific projects.
- Progress in taking the options outlined in the report forward were queried and how this would impact on policies. It was explained that the options were part of strategic level discussions at this stage.
- It was queried why the Chestnut Walk Joint Venture (JV) between the Council and SNG had not progressed. Councillor Gaines explained that two planning permissions had been granted in 2021 and 2022. However, viability became an issue due to a number of factors. These included high construction costs and a significant drainage issue. The JV was not therefore progressed. Further detail on this would be provided to the Committee.
- The level of engagement between SNG and its tenants was returned to. Ms Morgan explained that officers in the housing support team worked closely with customers, offering support across a wide range of areas. Customers were provided with single points of contact to discuss any issues.

Actions:

- **Planning Members would need to be provided with information on the different options/tools that would be taken forward, subject to agreement. This would be requested for inclusion in planning training when appropriate.**
- **Ms Morgan would provide a dedicated e-mail address that Members could use to raise any queries.**
- **Connecting Communities in Berkshire would be invited to join the work of the Policy Development Group. All Members should be made aware of the work of this organisation.**
- **The suggestion was made that almshouses could be a wider consideration for affordable housing, this could be taken forward with the Chair of the Almshouse Association. Councillor Gaines agreed this could be explored.**
- **The targets for the Local Plan period (to 2041) would be confirmed to the Committee.**

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- **Information would be provided on specific projects that were expected to come forward for affordable/social housing units.**
- **Further detail would be provided to explain why the Chestnut Walk JV had not progressed.**

RESOLVED that officers would continue to proceed with reviewing the preferred options (the toolkit) outlined in the report to help facilitate increased delivery of affordable housing locally. The toolkit, subject to a revision to bullet point 4, included:

- The establishment of a RP Framework with partner local authorities in order to formalise and incentivise development partners.
- Exploring the implications of accepting commuted sums on sites and to undertake further modelling on how this may affect delivery through key strategic relationships with RPs locally.
- The acceptance of a flexible approach to s106 agreements Implications and Impact Assessment.
- Continuing to engage with **Lee Dillon MP and commence engagement with Olivia Bailey MP** to lobby government and providers to tackle significant barriers to delivery at the current time.
- Not to proceed with the development of a Housing Company due to financial viability issues remaining significant.

7 **Appointment of Task and Finish Groups**

The Chairman introduced the item on Appointment of Task and Finish Groups (Agenda Item 8).

There were no draft terms of reference to approve, and no changes to membership of task and finish groups were proposed.

8 **Task and Finish Group Updates**

Councillor Chris Read provided an update on the work of the Project Management Task and Finish Group (Agenda Item 9).

The Task Group had met on 20 October – this was the first of two meetings to look at Care Director 6.

The following officers had given evidence:

- Kate Toone (Project Manager)
- Phil Cridge (Systems Integration Officer)
- Melanie O'Rourke (Service Director – Adult Social Care)

This had been a productive session, and officers were commended for their comprehensive preparation and presentations.

Various aspects were reviewed including:

- The project timeline
- Major milestones/gateways
- Project managers' involvement prior to setting up the project
- Risk management
- Tracking/reporting against project tolerances and the point at which it became clear the project was no longer on track
- The client/supplier relationship over the course of the project
- Support provided to the project manager by the project board.

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The Task Group had started to formulate some initial findings and recommendations, which would be tested and explored at the next session with senior managers.

Suppliers were invited to give evidence, but they declined.

The Task Group had also undertaken a survey of adult social care staff involved in user acceptance testing of Care Director 6.

Councillor Read had arranged a pre-meeting with officers regarding iTrent and an evidence session would be arranged for January. The intention was for iTrent to be covered off in a single session.

It was anticipated that the Task Group would be in a position to report back towards the end of March / beginning of April.

9 Executive Forward Plan September 2025 to March 2026

The Committee considered the Council's Forward Plan for the period to 31 March 2026 (Agenda Item 10).

It was noted that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan had been approved on 6 November. Members were advised that the consultation responses were included in the Executive papers.

Members asked about the Henwick Worthy Masterplan. Officers confirmed that consultation was underway on the Playing Pitch Strategy, and that an implementation plan would be developed, with Henwick Worthy forming part of this. Liaison was ongoing with various sporting bodies to understand what was achievable on the site. It was noted that the February deadline for Henwick Worthy would be pushed back pending these negotiations, with updated timescales to be confirmed. Until viable options had been agreed for the site, there would be little for the Committee to review. It was noted that the Playing Pitch Strategy was already on the Committee's work programme (date to be confirmed).

10 Corporate Programme

The Committee considered the Corporate Programme (Agenda Item 11).

Members asked for further details of when the Care Home Strategy could come forward for review.

Action: Officers to confirm when the Care Home Strategy could come forward for review.

It was suggested that the Committee may wish to review the Grazeley Solar Farm. Officers indicated that the business case was still being finalised (as referenced in the list of actions).

Action: Officers to come back with a suggested date for when the Committee could review the Grazeley Solar Farm.

11 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered its Work Programme (Agenda Item 12).

Members had previously requested an update on the Transformation Programme. It was agreed that this should be reviewed prior to scrutiny of the Council's budget and that progress should be presented in the form of a performance dashboard rather than a 'sales pitch'.

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Officers highlighted that the Executive would be looking at the Council's future financial sustainability, including how the Transformation Programme would support this. Governance arrangements would also be revised. Until this had happened, it would be difficult to put together the Transformation Programme, and it was suggested that this may not be available in advance of the budget.

Members noted that previous requests for updates had been deferred by officers. Also, the Executive Portfolio Holder had been asked for details of the costs and benefits of the programme, particularly in relation to asset disposal. The Committee had not been able to determine whether the programme was saving the Council money.

Members did not want the report to be deferred again and asked for a backward look in relation to savings made as well as an indication of the future direction of travel.

Project management and the Business Support Review were identified as important related items, and it was suggested that these be reviewed at the same meeting.

Additionally, the Committee requested an update on the implementation of the Mosaic social care case management system. While the Project Management Task and Finish Group was satisfied that project management practices were improving, there was a need to consider how this was informing decision making, particularly in relation to strategic IT projects such as Mosaic.

Action: Arrange an additional meeting prior to 10 February to review the Transformation Programme, Business Support Review, Project Management, and Mosaic.

Members asked for an update on current flood risk and the Council's Section 19 report. It was suggested that a review could be programmed for Spring 2026. It was noted that Thames Water was carrying out a range of upgrades to local infrastructure and had developed a Groundwater Development Plan.

Action: Officers to liaise internally and with Thames Water to agree an appropriate time to provide an update.

Members queried if any consideration had been given/whether preparations were in place for a potential drought. Officers to consider when an update could be given on this matter.

Action: Officers to consider when an update could be given on plans in place for a potential drought.

Members noted that the review of the Playing Pitch Strategy would need to be programmed once a timescale for its development was confirmed.

It was noted that a request had been made by a local resident for the Committee to look at transparency around the award of large contracts under delegated authority. Officers indicated that larger projects were included in the Budget, and these had full business cases, which were available to Members. It was explained that senior officers only had delegated authority up to £50,000, with larger contracts requiring Executive or Council decision. It was proposed to provide a short paper setting out the process and scheme of delegation.

Action: Officers to bring a briefing paper on the process and scheme of delegation for awarding contacts, addressing the concerns expressed in the resident's request.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 9.30pm)

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CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature