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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 17 MARCH 2026

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

Also Present: Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Kofi Adu-Gyamfi (Service Lead - Climate Change), Fiohn Menpes Greenslade (Senior Ecology Officer), Richard Howroyd (Service Lead - Procurement and Commissioning), Gabrielle Mancini (Service Lead - Cust Engagement & Transformation), Martyn Sargeant (Service Director (Strategy & Governance)), Daniel Warne (Waste Manager), Jon Winstanley (Service Director (Environment)), Councillor Erik Pattenden (via Zoom), Councillor David Marsh, Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Councillor Jeff Brooks (Leader of the Council), Councillor Stuart Gourley (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways) and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer (Scrutiny & Dem Services))

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Laura Coyle

PART I

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 3 February 2026 and 10 February 2026 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

2 Actions from previous Minutes

Members reviewed the actions from the previous meetings.

Members resolved to suspend standing orders to permit a member of the public, Ms Paula Saunderson, to address the Committee.

- **116/143** – Ms Saunderson made reference to the e-mail she had sent to Members of the Committee on 16 March 2026. These actions had been outstanding for some time and pollution of the Northbrook continued. Ms Saunderson made a request that the matter be progressed at the next meeting or external to this Committee.
- Councillor Stuart Gourley explained that communication continued with the Environment Agency as responsibility to test the Northbrook rested with them. They had advised that all their testing kits were currently deployed. However, Council Officers were working to access funding to make improvements to the Northbrook.
- Councillor Carolyne Culver thanked Ms Saunderson for continuing to highlight the matter and asked that a meeting be arranged as soon as possible to take this forward. An update could then be provided at the next Committee.

Members resolved to reinstate standing orders.

- **246 (Guidance for Task and Finish Groups)** – this guidance was requested for the next Committee. It was also being considered by the Constitution Review Task Group.
- **267 (Affordable Housing Delivery)** – it was felt that further scrutiny should be conducted with Sovereign Network Group (SNG). Councillor Culver agreed to share the SNG scorecards she had received with the Committee. The scorecards were used

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to help decide what action should be taken with properties, this included information on energy performance. Members raised the importance of reinvesting funds from the disposal of assets within the district.

Actions:

- **(116/143) a meeting be arranged as soon as possible to take these actions forward. An update could then be provided at the next Committee.**
- **(267) Councillor Culver agreed to share the SNG scorecards she had received with the Committee.**

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Chris Read declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 by virtue of the fact that he worked for a company with an interest in waste management. However, this was separate from his individual work duties. He therefore reported that, as his interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate.

4 Petitions

There were no petitions received at the meeting.

5 Three-weekly refuse waste collections progress update

The Committee considered the report (Agenda item 6) which provided an update on the early performance and impacts of the move to three weekly refuse (black bin) collections. The report outlined how the service change was progressing following implementation in September 2025.

Councillor Stuart Gourley (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways) presented the report on the implementation of the Council's three-weekly waste collection strategy. The strategy aimed to increase recycling rates, reduce waste and achieve cost savings while addressing environmental concerns. Early outcomes showed significant progress, including reductions in black bin waste and increases in recycling participation.

Councillor Gourley thanked residents for their adaptability and highlighted the Council's commitment to supporting those who struggled with the new system. He urged residents to come forward if they needed assistance.

Daniel Warne (Waste Manager) gave a presentation to Members which outlined the support provided to residents, lessons learnt, performance levels, and next steps.

A number of questions followed from Members, with the following points noted in response:

- The reported reduction in vehicle mileage was discussed (an estimated 9,700 miles per year), with a query about whether it took into account mileage for food waste collections. Officers confirmed that the reduction was specific to black bin collections and was estimated as a result of the move to three weekly collections.
- The potential for electric refuse vehicles was queried. Officers explained that while electric vehicles had been trialled, range limitations remained a challenge. The Council was currently using Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel for its food waste collection vehicles, which significantly reduced carbon emissions. Alternative options, such as use of electric vehicles, would continue to be explored.
- A request was made for quarterly reporting figures, i.e. on recycling levels, to be clarified in future reports in order to aid further comparisons. It needed to be made

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clear that three weekly collections started mid-year (in September 2025). Data prior to that date related to fortnightly collections. Councillor Gourley explained that the first two quarters of 2025/26 were still included for comparison purposes. He felt the data reflected when the three weekly collections commenced.

- The impact of bank holidays on collection schedules was queried. Officers clarified that collections proceeded as normal on bank holidays, with the exceptions of Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.
- A question was asked about the feasibility of developing a Council app to help residents track their collection days more easily. Officers explained that collection date reminders were available via the Council's website and a calendar was available. While this was noted, the view remained that an app could provide greater convenience. This option would be kept under review.
- The visual impact of multiple bins being placed out on collection days, particularly in small cul-de-sacs, was raised as a concern. It was suggested that ways to optimise collection schedules to reduce bin clutter should be explored. In response it was advised that collection schedules would be kept under review, but there was concern that alterations could create confusion. It was clarified that it was only necessary for residents to put out all bins once every six weeks.
- A number of queries were raised and discussion held in relation to the support available to residents. Requests for support, including requests for larger bins, had increased and there was concern that this could continue to grow, and the Council would incur additional costs.
- Cost increases were queried as a result of providing extra bin capacity and Mr Warne explained that while there had been additional costs during the initial implementation, this had since returned to normal levels.
- It was noted that some residents who had applied for additional bin capacity had been refused, with around 1,600 applications declined from 2,372 applications. It was clarified that residents could reapply if they continued to struggle with the changes and/or contact their local councillor for further advice and support.
- It was explained that West Berkshire's standard bin size was larger than in many other local authorities, so it was not the view that the standard size should increase.
- The Council was ahead of the curve in meeting the Government's incoming requirements on the collection of food waste.
- Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the public consultation on the proposed move to a three weekly collection and queried the resident support to make this change. Councillor Gourley explained that 52% of respondents felt this was achievable with support. The change was then progressed with support provided where needed.
- Councillor Gourley added that supportive comments had been received post implementation. This included at public meetings and from parish councils. There had also been positive comments on an informal basis, with some residents expressing surprise that there had not been a negative impact. He pointed out that only a very small percentage of residents (approximately 3%) had left excessive waste for collection at the kerbside.
- Councillor Mackinnon voiced concern that some residents were unhappy following this change and queried what they could do if their application for support had been refused. Councillor Gourley made an offer to residents who were struggling to contact him to discuss options. He accepted there was not a one size fits all

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approach and the Council wanted to support its residents. Officers could offer advice to residents, consider a targeted intervention, and were happy to conduct a site visit to see how challenges could be resolved. Councillor Gourley pointed out that over a number of previous years, the acceptance level for applications for support was approximately 50%. Councillor Mackinnon felt that the data showed the percentage of refusals for 2025/26 was far higher and queried the level of analysis that had been undertaken.

- The criteria for the provision of a larger bin were clarified as being for households in excess of five people, families with two children in nappies, or where people had a particular medical condition. Applicants for a larger bin could input free text to explain any particular circumstances in support of their case. Applications which highlighted a particular circumstance were reviewed by an officer.
- A request was made for the data that informed the graph that related to levels of affluence and waste production across different local authorities, in order to assist analysis.
- Councillor Chris Read offered congratulations to officers and partner organisations for their delivery of this project, particularly when there had been concerns from members of the public. Communication with residents was positive and it was pleasing to note that there had already been a reflection on lessons learnt.
- Councillor Read added that feedback from residents within his Ward had changed for the positive. Residents had been particularly supportive when they became aware of the money being saved and the return being achieved on investment.
- Councillor Gourley explained that savings were being driven by the actions of residents in their disposal and recycling of waste. His expectation was that this would increase over 2026/27.
- Councillor Read stated that an increase in fly tipping of residential waste had been a point of concern for some. However, he had noted no such increase within his Ward and he had not received any increase in reports from residents.
- The quantity of recycling containers was queried as being necessary and in response, Councillor Gourley advised that a reduced quantity of containers would result in recycling being co-mingled and lessen the recycling rate. Approximately, only 3% of waste sent for recycling was rejected in West Berkshire, whereas local authorities who did co-mingle their recycling had, on average, 30% of their recycling rejected. Recycling containers would be reviewed in due course.
- Members queried the approach with waste management should the Council join with South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils as part of Local Government Reorganisation. It was acknowledged that there was no confirmation as to whether this proposal would proceed, however Councillor Gourley clarified that South and Vale's waste contract had recently been renewed and the Council's Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for waste would run until 2032. Imminent changes were therefore unlikely. It was also pointed out that South and Vale were responsible for waste collection, but disposal was the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council.
- Councillor Gourley agreed to provide information on disposal/recycling options for electrical items.
- Councillor Gourley advised that an announcement would be made by the end of March 2026 on additional items that could be recycled at the kerbside.

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The Committee commended the progress made under the new waste collection strategy and acknowledged the efforts of officers in the implementation of these changes and those of residents in adapting to the changes. Members were pleased to note progress to date. Support should continue to be made available to residents where possible and the potential to create an app to assist residents with tracking their collection days should be kept under review.

Officers confirmed that data collection and analysis would continue of the move to three-weekly collections and its impact on recycling rates, fly-tipping and resident satisfaction.

Actions:

- **Daniel Warne to provide the data that informed the graph that related to levels of affluence and waste production across different local authorities, in order to assist analysis.**
- **Councillor Gourley agreed to provide information on disposal/recycling options for electrical items.**

RESOLVED to note the effects of the move to three weekly refuse collections.

6 Procurement Governance

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 7) which provided details of the governance in place to ensure robust procurement of goods and services, particularly for contracts over £2.5m, in order to enable the Committee to respond to a proposal from a member of the public for a scrutiny review.

Members resolved to suspend standing orders to permit a member of the public, Mr Paul Morgan, to address the Committee.

Mr Morgan did not feel that the report addressed the points made in his request for a scrutiny review. He offered to provide further evidence to support his concerns for when the full review was undertaken.

Mr Morgan felt that transparency of some key decisions for the awarding of contracts was lacking. He was concerned at the level of delegation afforded to officers to make these decisions. Mr Morgan felt that there should be greater transparency of reports relating to the award of sizeable contracts, as had been the process prior to 2023. He requested that this prior process be reintroduced.

Members resolved to reinstate standing orders.

Mr Martin Sargeant (Service Director – Strategy and Governance) presented the report which provided background information on the Council's procurement processes. The report was intended to inform the Committee's decision on whether or not to proceed with a scrutiny review.

Mr Richard Howroyd (Service Lead – Procurement and Commissioning) explained that he had been reviewing the Council's procurement processes since commencing his role in December 2025. His findings to date included the view that the Council's processes were in keeping with other local authorities. Alongside this, Mr Howroyd explained that he was working on a new Procurement Strategy which would be brought to the Executive for approval in due course. He would seek input from the Constitution Review Task Group as part of this work.

Councillor Howard Woollaston felt that the level of transparency for the award of contracts, with a value in excess of £2.5m, had decreased since 2023. He added concerns about a lack of transparency for lower value contracts. There was also the need for Members to be able to review alternative options.

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Mr Howroyd explained that the Procurement Act 2023 introduced significant changes, including requirements for transparency at certain stages. However, while Members could be involved prior to the contract award phase, the Act limited such input at the award stage and during the standstill period that followed.

It was suggested that training sessions could be arranged for Members on procurement processes to help improve understanding of the process and when engagement could take place. This was welcomed by Members.

Councillor Carlyne Culver felt that paperwork should be made available at the pre-procurement phase, i.e. the development of business cases. She highlighted some examples where such paperwork was not made available.

Councillor Culver noted that some of the points raised in the scrutiny request had not been addressed in this report. She was of the view that the scrutiny request had been accepted.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon felt that Member oversight of contracts could be valuable and paperwork should be made available at the appropriate stages, recognising that this might be restricted to Part II. Democratic oversight was needed for the significant expenditure of public money and this should include both Executive and non-Executive Members to help maintain public confidence.

Mr Howroyd agreed that transparency was important as was Member involvement. The timing of this did however need careful consideration to avoid risks of legal challenge. This would form part of carefully managed procedures.

Mr Howroyd stated that he could return to scrutiny if Members wanted further input to the Procurement Strategy.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj felt that a level of oversight was already in place with Members able to scrutinise the procurement plans formulated by officers.

Councillor Jeff Brooks (Leader of the Council) outlined that there was a level of scrutiny in place for the formation of business cases and there was potential for this to be enhanced before the procurement process was entered into. This could be progressed through the Constitution Review Task Group.

There was however a need for extreme caution for the actual procurement phase, taking into account the tightened requirements of the Procurement Act.

Councillor Brooks felt it could be useful for scrutiny to consider the Procurement Strategy prior to it being submitted to the Executive.

Councillor Culver requested that the report return to Committee, providing any outstanding information in response to Mr Morgan's scrutiny request, and explaining where information could not be provided. Wider scrutiny could then follow.

Action:

- **An updated version of the report would return to Committee for further scrutiny.**

7 Swift Bricks

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 8) which provided information relating to swifts and swift bricks, and their use in West Berkshire following the Motion to Council by Councillor David Marsh.

Fiohn Menpes Greenslade (Senior Ecology Officer) presented the report on the feasibility of increasing the use of swift bricks within West Berkshire. The report responded to the

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Council motion proposing the installation of swift bricks within Council owned properties and requiring their inclusion in new developments.

In summary, the report recommended that the Motion and its proposals could not be supported. The date proposed in the Motion for the installation of swift bricks and boxes in suitable Council owned properties of May 2026 was too soon. There were also cost implications.

Other proposals within the Motion requested that swift bricks be subject to planning conditions. However, it was pointed out that conditions could only be put forward on a case by case basis and would need to meet the six tests for a planning condition that were set nationally.

However, efforts were being made to secure swift bricks and boxes where appropriate and where there was justification for doing so. This was being supported in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and would be strengthened in the Council's next Local Plan.

It was pointed out that biodiversity net gain could not be achieved from swift bricks as they were an artificial enhancement.

Councillor David Marsh made the following points as the Mover of the Motion at Council:

- He was disappointed that the Motion could not be supported, at least in principle. Councillor Marsh acknowledged that this could no longer be achieved by May 2026, but felt that the Council should endeavour to do as much as possible without incurring considerable expense. He felt that the cost could be met by developers for new builds.
- Councillor Marsh proposed that officers could engage with other local authorities who had, to differing degrees, included requirements for swift bricks within their policies and within planning conditions. It would be useful to understand how this had been implemented and levels of success.
- He had noted that some developers had voluntarily committed to providing swift bricks through the Homes for Nature programme.
- Councillor Marsh felt that some aspects proposed by the Motion were a relatively straight forward win.

The following points were raised in the debate:

- While it was noted that some developers had indicated a willingness to fund swift bricks, concerns were raised about the potential impact on affordable housing delivery and cost implications. The point was made that developers did routinely flag cost concerns for the provision of affordable housing.
- It was noted that there could be no partial acceptance of the Motion, but Members felt it should be progressed as part of conversations on the new Local Plan.
- Clare Lawrence (Executive Director for Place) explained that Central Government had placed a requirement on the Council to develop a new Local Plan within a period of 30 months. This would follow a more streamlined approach than in previous years. The existing Local Plan did enable the Council to negotiate ecological requirements with developers, and swift bricks was one of those options. Therefore, such conditions could be sought for appropriate schemes.
- The ability to enforce the incorporation of swift bricks was flagged as a concern as there was a limit on the enforcement resource available.
- It was suggested that the Council's communications team could raise public awareness about swift bricks and encourage residents to voluntarily install them in their own properties.

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Councillor Jeremy Cottam stated that while support could be given to the Motion in principle, he did not feel it could be recommended for acceptance to the Executive. He therefore proposed acceptance of the recommendation in the report to not support the Motion. This was seconded by Councillor Ross Mackinnon.

It was felt that clearer guidance was required on the actions that could be taken by scrutiny with future motions that came before the Scrutiny Committees. For example, could Motions be accepted in part or amended to include additional recommendations? This point was noted for future consideration by the Constitution Review Task Group.

Members discussed the large quantity of work that would be required for the next Local Plan Review in the absence of the Planning Advisory Group which had previously conducted this work within Part II discussions. Members did not feel that this detailed work could fall to the Scrutiny Committee as it did not have the necessary capacity.

The following recommendations were suggested for addition to the proposal to not support the Motion, which were agreed by Councillors Cottam and Mackinnon:

- To request that officers engage with other local authorities who had, to differing degrees, included requirements for swift bricks within their policies and within planning conditions to understand what had been achieved in other areas.
- That the next Local Plan explicitly include wording on swift bricks to strengthen biodiversity requirements.
- That a cross-party working group needed to be formed with officers to undertake the next Local Plan Review.

Action:

- **Clearer guidance would be sought from the Constitution Review Task Group on the actions that could be taken by scrutiny with future motions that came before the Scrutiny Committees.**

RESOLVED that the Motion could not be supported for the reasons outlined in the report. However, the recommendations agreed by the Committee would be put forward for consideration.

8 Appointment of Task and Finish Groups

The Chairman introduced the item on Appointment of Task and Finish Groups (Agenda Item 9).

Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed the formation of a task group to consider the Council's budget setting processes. This would include coverage of the identification of savings and forecasting. Councillor Mackinnon offered to be part of the task group and to help form its Terms of Reference.

Additional scrutiny of the budget was particularly important when considering the highly challenging financial situation. The group could propose recommendations that would assist future budget setting.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Richard Somner.

The proposal was supported, subject to having a clear scope for the work. Members felt it would be most appropriate for a Member of the Minority Group to Chair the task group.

Councillor Carlyne Culver felt that this could either be a time limited task group or potentially a sub-committee.

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Councillors Culver, Mackinnon and Erik Pattenden agreed to meet to begin work on the Terms of Reference. It was noted that a review on processes was due to be undertaken by officers in Finance and the scrutiny work would need to link in with this.

Action:

- **Councillors Culver, Mackinnon and Pattenden agreed to meet to begin work on the Terms of Reference.**

RESOLVED to note the update and agree, in principle, to the formation of a budget setting task and finish group.

9 Task and Finish Group Updates: Project Management Task and Finish Group Report

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 10) which presented the findings of the Project Management Task and Finish Group, which reviewed the Council's approach to managing major projects and sought to identify lessons to be learned from recent projects, including Care Director v6, and iTrent (Phase 1). The report proposed recommendations based on the evidence gathered which, if implemented, would help to inform the Council's approach to project management in future.

Councillor Chris Read (Chairman of the Task and Finish Group) presented the report, outlining the findings of the review into the Council's project management practices. The review assessed the Council's project management methodology, governance, and lessons learned from previous projects.

In general terms, best practice was being followed with project management. The centralisation of project management was also positive.

More specifically, Care Director v6, and iTrent (Phase 1) were examined in detail.

The report included 25 recommendations aimed at improving project management practices across the Council.

Concern was highlighted in the report that learning from past reviews, particularly that related to the London Road Industrial Estate project, had not been fully embedded in working practices.

Councillor Read took the opportunity to thank his fellow Members on the Task and Finish Group, and the officers who contributed to the review. In particular, he highlighted the input from Kate Toone (Project Manager) and from Gordon Oliver (the Clerk to the review).

The following points were raised in the debate:

- The concern was shared that recommendations highlighted in previous reviews had not been taken on board. It was emphasised that lessons from these reviews must be embedded to avoid issues repeating in future projects.
- Concerns were raised about the storage of and access to key project documents which were sometimes held by external contractors rather than in-house. A question was also asked about the adequacy of escalation processes for projects.
- Gabrielle Mancini (Service Director for Transformation, Customer and ICT) explained that a number of the observations made in the review predated the restructure of the project management service. She expressed confidence that outstanding concerns were in the process of being overcome, i.e. document storage.
- Gabrielle Mancini went on to explain that the revised project management methodology included clear escalation routes for project managers. Improved training had also been introduced for project managers and project sponsors.

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- A question was asked about how the centralisation of project management would ensure that the voices of individual departments were heard. Gabrielle Mancini explained that while project managers were centralised, project sponsors were typically senior managers from the relevant service area. Additionally, multidisciplinary project teams, including representatives from legal, finance, and ICT, ensured that expertise from across the Council was incorporated into project delivery.
- There was concern that ICT resources were stretched and there was the potential for single points of failure within the service. ICT needed to be adequately resourced. Gabrielle Mancini outlined plans to address these concerns, in particular removing the risk of single points of failure. This was an area of focus for the new Service Lead for ICT.

The Committee expressed its gratitude to Councillor Read, the task and finish group, and the officers involved for their thorough and transparent review. Members agreed to recommend the report to the Executive for consideration and to track the implementation of agreed recommendations.

RESOLVED that the Task and Finish Group's recommendations would be referred to the Executive for consideration.

10 Executive Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Council's Forward Plan for the period up to 30 June 2026 (Agenda Item 11).

Action:

- **Dates for Individual Decisions to be taken in relation to 20mph zones would be confirmed.**

11 Corporate Programme

The Committee considered the Corporate Programme (Agenda Item 12).

Fibre broadband coverage to rural properties (99%) was estimated for delivery by 2032. However, it was queried whether capacity would indeed be added. There was concern that 5G roll-out could not be achieved in rural areas.

Action:

- **Item to be added to the Work Programme (timing to be confirmed).**

12 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered its Work Programme (Agenda Item 13).

The potential to hold an extraordinary meeting was discussed. This could cover items including:

- Grazeley Solar Farm
- Playing Pitch Strategy
- Environment Strategy

The extraordinary meeting would be held in advance of these items being considered by the Executive on 21 May 2026.

Stephen Chard to confirm timescales for these reports and determine whether pre-scrutiny could be undertaken on these items. An extraordinary meeting could then be arranged.

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The timescales for a report on pedestrianisation remained to be confirmed.

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

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature