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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY 2 JULY 2026

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Iain Cottingham, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Tom McCann, Justin Pemberton and Vic Poole

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, David Marsh Adrian Abbs and Clive Hooker

Officers Present: Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director for Finance, Property and Procurement, Section 151 Officer), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Gabrielle Mancini (Service Lead - Cust Engagement & Transformation), Ashley Milum (Service Director for Education and SEND), Martyn Sargeant (Service Director (Strategy & Governance)) and Beatriz Teixeira (Performance Research & Consultation Manager), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Thomas Radbourne and Nicola Thomas

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Heather Codling and Councillor Nigel Foot

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 21 May 2026 and 11 June 2026 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Leader.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Public Questions

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: Transcription of Q&As.

4. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

5. 2025/26 Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 7) which provided the provisional outturn report on the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital year-end for the 2025/26 financial year.

Councillor Cottingham noted that the report had already been considered by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 29 June 2026 and reported that since that meeting, the draft statutory accounts had been published on the Council's website. These showed a different adverse variance from that stated in the outturn report. The report before the Executive showed an adverse variance of £5.5m against the original budget, whereas the draft statutory accounts showed an adverse variance of £3.6m. Councillor Cottingham explained that this difference arose from a financial accounting adjustment in relation to Council leases on assets, in particular Birchwood Care Home. He emphasised that this was a technical accounting adjustment which deferred a cost to

the balance sheet, did not provide any cash benefit, and did not alter the required Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) position of £16.8 million.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commended officers for their work in managing the budget position and reducing the overspend over the course of the year. The budget position, while still an overspend, had improved significantly.

Councillor Adrian Abbs raised a question regarding the budget for the Faraday Road playing pitch. He noted that the budget of approximately one year ago was estimated to be £1.25m, however this work had not been completed and he queried when this would be and whether the budget had increased. He further observed that, if the scheme was to be fully funded from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), it was important to establish as soon as possible whether sufficient funding remained available.

In response, Councillor Cottingham confirmed that work was ongoing to assess whether the budget needed to be revised for the project. This would be brought back to the Executive in due course. Councillor Brooks added that, in line with the indication already given at the meeting in response to a public question, a further report would come to Executive as soon as possible setting out the updated position.

RESOLVED that Executive is informed of the following**:**

Revenue:

- The Provisional Revenue Outturn is +£9.4m/ 5.1% adverse to Budget (Budget £183.4m, Provisional Revenue Outturn £192.9m). Several year-end adjustments are required to the Provisional Revenue Outturn because of specific reserve related transactions and obligations noted below. As a result of these adjustments, the Adjusted Provisional Revenue Outturn (the key Revenue outturn metric) is +**£5.5m/ 3.0%** adverse to Budget (Budget £183.4m, Adjusted Provisional Revenue Outturn £188.9m). However, as confirmed at the meeting, the adverse to the Budget had reduced to **£3.6m**. The Adjusted Provisional Revenue Outturn is -**£3.0m/ 1.7%** favourable compared to the Q3 forecasts, (Q3 Outturn £192.0m, Adjusted Provisional Revenue Outturn £188.9m). Note: all values in this report are pre IFRS 16 (lease) adjustment – the impact of which is not expected to be material. The material year end adjustments are as follows:
    - A Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspend of +£8.8m. The overspend is subject to a statutory override, enabling the Council to transfer this overspend to a separate reserve, thereby protecting the Council's General Fund. The DSG overspend was -£5m favourable vs the Budget. The year-end cumulative DSG reserve balance is £25m.
    - A Public Health Grant underspend of -£358k. Public Health funds are ringfenced and cannot be deployed in support of the Council's General Fund position. This adjustment is required to transfer this value to the Public Health reserve.
    - A Capital Financing & Management Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) adjustment of -£5.1m. MRP is a statutory capital financing adjustment between the General Fund and unusable reserves relating to the provision for the repayment of capital debt.
- In accordance with the Council's policy on the use of flexible capital receipts, £4.3m of capital receipts has been applied to transformation expenditure in both the Provisional Revenue Outturn and Adjusted Provisional Revenue Outturn.

Capital:

- The Provisional Capital Outturn is £44.2m of expenditure against an approved expenditure programme of £60.9m. Of the £44.2m capital expenditure incurred,

£15.0m was funded by the Council. The remaining £29.2m was financed from external sources, primarily grants, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions.

- Reprofiling planned capital expenditure between 2025/26 and 2026/27 results in an adjusted net underspend of £3.1m/ 5.1% against budget. The reprofiling adjustments are as follows:
    - £14.3m of planned expenditure to be reprofiled into financial years 2026/27 and 2027/28 – see Appendix A.
    - £0.7m of funding proposed to be brought forward from approved expenditure from financial year 2026/27 into financial year 2025/26 – see Appendix B.
- The impact of required capital financing on the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) and liability benchmark which identifies the Council as a long-term borrower of funding can be found in the 2025/26 Annual Treasury Management Review which is due at Governance Committee on 28 July 2026.

6. 2026-2027 Council Strategy Refresh

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed the refreshed Council Strategy 2023-2027 (Agenda Item 8). The refreshed Strategy confirmed the Council's strategic priorities, outcomes and areas of focus. The Strategy would inform the Council's strategic direction and would underpin service plans and performance management over the remainder of the Strategy period.

Councillor Brooks advised that it was appropriate to review the Strategy annually, particularly three years into the Administration's cycle, in order to assess what had been delivered, what should reasonably be removed because circumstances had changed, and what required updating.

Approval was sought from the Executive to endorse the refreshed Strategy and refer it to the Council meeting on 16 July 2026 as this was a matter for Council to determine.

Councillor David Marsh raised concerns about the removal of the measure in relation to the retention of Local Education Authority (LEA) maintained schools rather than schools converting to academy status. He queried why this had been removed.

In response, Councillor Brooks stated that a small number of schools had converted to academy status over the course of the Strategy. He did however reiterate the Administration's position that it wanted to keep West Berkshire schools as part of the LEA rather than becoming academies. Councillor Brooks added that central government's position on this matter was changing and government was looking to schools to become academies. This made it very difficult to set meaningful targets in this area.

Councillor Marsh next questioned whether Member bids would be continuing. Councillor Brooks pointed out that this process had recently been undertaken and successful bids could be implemented.

Councillor Marsh made reference to the Highways Asset Management Plan (AMP) and queried if it would remain as a strategic commitment. Councillor Stuart Gourley explained that the Highways AMP would be continuing as business as usual. The focus of the Council Strategy was on change, growth and long-term activities and objectives.

Councillor Brooks explained that he would arrange for a separate report to be circulated to Members which outlined why some measures did not feature in the refreshed Strategy, such as areas of work becoming ingrained as business as usual.

Councillor Adrian Abbs highlighted inconsistencies in the document, with references made to different version numbers. In response, Beatriz Teixeira (Performance,

Research and Consultation Manager) confirmed that this was a typographical error and that version 6.2 was the correct version.

Councillor Abbs went on to raise broader concerns across this agenda item and the subsequent item (the Q4 Performance Report) both of which needed additional information. These included the absence of any reference to the reprofiling of the Faraday Road football pitch and the status of the Bond Riverside project. In terms of the latter, the reports indicated that the project was completed but his understanding was that the budget for this project was being reprofiled. Councillor Brooks asked Beatriz Teixeira to respond to Councillor Abbs on the points raised external to the meeting.

Councillor Jo Stewart queried whether the reason for the proposed removal of the measure concerning the number of active champions for Health in all Policies was due to them being in place and therefore business as usual rather than the initiative being abandoned. Councillor Patrick Clark confirmed that the champions were in place with the roles being fulfilled. Councillor Stewart was pleased to note that this was the case.

Councillor Richard Somner supported the point that greater clarity was needed to help understand why certain measures had been removed. He suggested that information be included to explain whether this was as a result of the item being completed, becoming business as usual, or had come to the end of its lifecycle. Councillor Brooks agreed with this point and confirmed that additional explanatory information would be added to accompany the final version of the report being considered by Council.

RESOLVED that:

- The proposed refresh of the Council Strategy, as submitted in presentation format at Appendix A, be noted and reviewed.
- The proposed approach to the refresh of Council Strategy indicators, including Financial Resilience as an additional, crosscutting strategic priority, had been considered and would be recommended to Council for approval.
- The refreshed Strategy would be referred to Council for consideration.

7. 2025/26 Performance Report Q4

Councillor Vicky Poole introduced and proposed the 2025/26 Quarter 4 Performance Report (Agenda Item 9). The report provided assurance that the priority areas in the Council Strategy were being managed effectively as at the end of the 2025/26 year and, where performance had fallen below the expected level, presented information on the remedial action taken and the impact of that action.

Councillor Poole pointed out that future reports would use the new reporting measures aligned to the refreshed Council Strategy and this would therefore be the last report covering the existing measures. It was noted that the report had already been considered by the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee earlier in the week.

Portfolio Holders were invited to comment on the indicators in their own portfolios that were rated red or amber.

Councillor Stuart Gourley outlined progress with permanent pothole repairs over the course of 2025/26. Performance had been at a lower level in Quarter 1, Quarters 2 and 3 were on target, but over the course of the winter months (Quarter 4) it had become more challenging to maintain good performance. Officers had been and would continue to work closely with contractors to make improvements, i.e. to the supply chain, in order to achieve more consistently high performance. Councillor Gourley concluded on this point by highlighting the level of investment into the entire highway network and the improvements achieved as a result.

Councillor Jeff Brooks made reference to the Playing Pitch Strategy measure. While it was reported as being behind schedule in the report, he was able to report that this had been rectified and the current status was that the Strategy was back on schedule. Beatriz Teixeira confirmed that this was a consequence of the reporting methodology and timeframes. She added that commentary could be inserted into these reports to provide up to date progress where possible, but this would not alter the RAG status.

Councillor Denise Gaines highlighted that the Council was ahead of its affordable homes target for 2030 and further improvements continued to be sought. She added that further affordable homes were scheduled for development.

Councillor Gourley confirmed that the business case for the Grazeley Solar Farm project would be considered by both Scrutiny and the Executive in September 2026.

Councillor Patrick Clark referred to the indicator '% of referrals allocated in the previous 12 months without any waiting time (rolling 12 months)' and explained that performance was 0.5% short of the target of 60%. Councillor Clark added that additional investment was planned in this area in order to try and improve performance.

Councillor Brooks outlined progress with the Corporate Transformation Programme (2.0). He thanked Members of the Transformation Policy Development Group for their work in helping to develop the Programme. The Programme (2.0) would be presented to an extraordinary Executive on 23 July 2026.

Councillor Iain Cottingham advised that the measure to 'Commission and complete a marketing exercise for Bond Riverside' had been completed. This was an update from the Quarter 4 position.

Councillor Adrian Abbs felt it would be useful for an additional measure to monitor the underspend against the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). He also felt that the measure for the refresh of the Playing Pitch Strategy should be enhanced so that the Faraday Road football pitch was specifically referenced.

RESOLVED that:

- The progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027 priorities scheduled for this financial year be noted.
- Reviewed those areas where performance was below target i.e., reporting as 'Red' or 'Amber, had been reviewed, and the remedial action taken noted.

8. Automatic Fire Suppression - Council Motion and Response

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed the report on Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (Agenda Item 10). This report was produced in response to the Motion submitted to Council on 16 October 2025 which requested that the Council "commit to the installation of sprinklers or other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) in the Council's own building stock when constructing new buildings, significant extensions and relevant refurbishment of existing buildings".

Councillor Brooks explained that although an existing policy was in place, this report proposed the adoption of an updated and strengthened AFSS Policy and Procedure which included a widening of the criteria for the installation of an AFSS as outlined in paragraph 5.8 of the report. This included automatic inclusion at all new care homes and all new schools. Where a project reached or exceeded the criteria thresholds in the Policy, there would be an assumption in favour of the installation of an AFSS. This would save lives and protect property.

Councillor Brooks added that insurance costs were expected to reduce as a result of the updated Policy.

Councillor Adrian Abbs gave his full support to the proposal. He did however point out that it would have been preferable to have been able to apply the policy retrospectively. Councillor Brooks explained that it would be possible to apply the policy for existing buildings undergoing a major refurbishment.

RESOLVED that:

- The Executive was informed of the Motion on AFSS.
- The importance of sprinklers and other AFSS to save lives, protect property, reduce the impact of fire on the environment, reduce interruption to business and improve safety for individuals in the community in general and firefighters was recognised.
- The update to the Automatic Fire Suppression (AFSS) Policy and Procedure as detailed in Appendix B be approved.

9. Response to Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Group Report- Project Management

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed the report which set out the Executive's response to the recommendations of the Project Management Task and Finish Group (a task group of the Resource and Place Scrutiny Committee) (Agenda Item 11).

Councillor Brooks thanked all Members involved in the review. He described it as a good piece of work that had formed a sound set of recommendations, all of which had been accepted.

Gabrielle Mancini (Service Director for Transformation, Customer and ICT) was then invited to address the meeting. She explained that many of the recommendations were already in the process of being implemented. In particular, she highlighted improvements to project management assurance including more effective business case development and the establishment of a clearer link between project activity and return on investment. This was especially important given the Council's financial situation.

She also highlighted improvements to the structure of the project management function. Greater consistency had been achieved in the operation of project management from this more centralised approach.

Ms Mancini also referred to a strengthening in the identification of lessons to be learnt from projects in order to make improvements to processes for future projects. Routine health checks were being carried out on projects, again to identify areas of learning, with the findings from these compiled into a central record to ensure they were captured.

Councillor Brooks highlighted the benefits of having a contractual register in place. This would enable the Council to more actively look ahead at when contracts were due to expire and to procure replacements in good time.

Councillor Chris Read, who had chaired the Task and Finish Group, thanked the other Members of the group and all the officers who had presented evidence and supported the group. This had been very useful in helping to identify where lessons could be learnt, but also in highlighting those areas that were working well.

Councillor Adrian Abbs, a Member of the Task Group, spoke in support of the report and gave thanks to Councillor Read for his chairmanship of the review. Councillor Abbs commented that the Task and Finish Group had benefited from the expert and relevant knowledge held by those Members who had formed the group.

Councillor Vic Poole praised the detailed work that had gone into it the review and stated that she looked forward to seeing the implementation of the recommendations and action points.

RESOLVED that:

- The findings of the Task and Finish Group be noted.
- The management response and proposed actions set out in Section 6 be agreed.
- Progress against the agreed actions will be reported to Transformation and Corporate Programme Board and reviewed by Internal Audit within the timeframe suggested by the Task and Finish Group.

10. Thames Valley Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) Development and Governance

Councillor Denise Gaines introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 12) which sought Executive approval to establish a joint partnership across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Swindon councils to develop a statutory Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the Thames Valley (the final geography was expected to be confirmed by the Autumn of 2026). The Executive was asked to acknowledge the preparatory work completed to date and agree the interim governance and funding arrangements, with Bracknell Forest Council as the accountable body with responsibility for holding the funds, administering payments, undertaking financial reporting and hosting any dedicated SDS staff.

Agreement was also sought of the objectives for the pre-inception phase, and the plans for collaboration, monitoring and engagement leading up to the secondary legislation being issued and the formal Strategic Planning Board being established in Autumn 2026. These shadow governance arrangements would include a shadow member board, senior officer oversight, a hosted programme management office and a strategic planning unit. The shadow governance arrangements would help to ensure that the process and infrastructure were in place before the secondary legislation was enacted.

This was a high level Strategy at this stage, with the secondary legislation awaited. It was the Government's intention for all these strategies to have been examined externally by 2030.

Preparatory work had already begun, including engagement with Government and expressions of interest for funding. This had resulted in £750,000 of Government funding being secured across the participating authorities to support the initial stages of the work.

Councillor Gaines explained that the SDS was expected to support strategic planning across the Thames Valley for areas including housing, employment, infrastructure, climate resilience, nature recovery, active travel and access to services.

Councillor Jeff Brooks added that this provided a positive opportunity to develop strategic planning with partner local authorities across the region. Councillor Gaines agreed this was a positive development for the Thames Valley.

Councillor Richard Somner made reference to a recent press report concerning wider regional governance discussions which he felt raised concerns with a Thames Valley wide approach. He queried the level of confidence in this proposed approach.

Councillor Brooks replied that he had been involved in strategic level discussions and stated his view that the participating councils would work together for the benefit of future development across the Thames Valley. Councillor Gaines added her hope that partners would continue to work together, as they had done to date. It was important for West Berkshire Council to be involved in the SDS.

Councillor Somner agreed it was essential for the Council to be involved and raised the importance of partner local authorities working together on shared priorities and sharing resources fairly.

Councillor Brooks concluding the item by giving thanks to Councillor Gaines and officers for the work undertaken to date, and for the work that would follow.

RESOLVED to:

- Approve the establishment of a partnership with the Berkshire unitary councils, Oxfordshire councils and Swindon Borough Council to develop a statutory Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the Thames Valley area.
- Approve the proposed funding and resource allocations for the pre-inception programme, including agreement that Bracknell Forest Council will act as the accountable body for funds received/held on behalf of the partnership and will host any staff appointed for the Thames Valley SDS programme.
- Agree the interim governance, monitoring and assurance arrangements set out in this report, including arrangements for the period before a statutory Strategic Planning Board/Spatial Planning Board (SPB) is established through secondary legislation.
- Agree to the working arrangements for development of the SDS.
- Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing, to enter into the inter-authority agreement to establish the Partnership.

11. A Whole System Prevention Approach

Councillor Patrick Clark introduced and proposed the report which set out West Berkshire's overarching approach to prevention across children, families and adults (Agenda Item 13). The intention of the approach was to provide a clear, unified framework for how the Council and its partners would prevent need arising, reduce escalation of issues, and delay dependency on statutory services.

It was explained that this was not a delivery strategy but an overarching paper that set out West Berkshire's prevention approach. It defined how West Berkshire worked as a system, aligning existing strategies including the Children and Family Strategy 2026-2029 (Prevention), Family Help and Prevention Strategy 2026-2029, and Staying Strong – the Prevention offer for Adults 2026-2028.

Councillor Clark explained that the approach reflected the need for support to be available for residents to help them live independently throughout their lives. This could be through reablement and rehabilitation, support for complex needs, and long-term condition management. The Council already delivered much of this work, but the purpose of this report was to refocus resources towards a preventative model rather than a reactive one.

Councillor Jo Stewart welcomed the report. She agreed that having a whole system approach was positive. She also praised the case study examples included in the strategy documents as they provided useful clarity. She felt that it would be beneficial to follow this example in future documents where relevant.

Councillor Stewart did however point out that she had identified a number of errors in the Staying Strong document that she would share separately with Councillor Clark and Paul Coe.

Councillor Stewart continued by welcoming the specific actions within the strategy documents. This included neighbourhood walkabouts that would, with the involvement of Ward Members, focus on areas facing deprivation or antisocial behaviour. Councillor Stewart stated that she looked forward to seeing the delivery plan as this would help to map progress. Councillor Clark added that progress would continue to be reported back.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that the report emphasised the importance of consultation, engagement, collaboration and co-production in this work and he queried the level of input from Members.

In response, Dave Wraight, Service Lead for Youth Justice, Family Hubs and Partnerships, explained that a range of workshops, surveys and co-production events had taken place involving a number of stakeholders including parents. This included engagement with Members in various community settings within their respective wards.

Councillor Boeck supported this strong model of co-production and asked whether this approach would apply more widely for the development of strategies and policies relating to children. Councillor Brooks replied that this sounded a reasonable approach, but stated that he would respond to Councillor Boeck after he had consulted Councillor Heather Codling, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services.

Councillor Boeck followed this by making reference to a recent Individual Decision, relating to the Section 19 Statement and Educational Neglect Policy, where he felt the same level of co-production had not been followed. He felt this was inconsistent. Councillor Brooks offered to Councillor Boeck to put these particular concerns in writing, as they did not relate to this agenda item, and the matter would be considered external to this meeting.

Councillor Adrian Abbs noted that there was no specific reference in the document to the use of assistive technology and queried if this would feature in this work where appropriate. Paul Coe, Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Public Health, gave an assurance that while this activity was not specifically referenced in this report, plans were coming forward for digital and AI-related initiatives.

RESOLVED that:

- The Executive are informed of the whole system preventative approach set out in this report as the Council's overarching framework for prevention across children, families and adults, recognising that detailed delivery, implementation and measurable outcomes will be governed through the aligned strategies, including the Children and Families System Strategy 2026–2030, the Family Help and Prevention Strategy 2026– 2029 and the Staying Strong – the Prevention offer for Adults 2026–2028.

12. Members' Questions

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: Transcription of Q&As.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 8.05 pm)

CHAIRMAN ……

Date of Signature ……