RESOURCES AND PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 29 JUNE 2026

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

Also Present: Sarah Clarke (Executive Director (Resources)), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director for Finance, Property and Procurement, Section 151 Officer), Laura Callan (Interim Service Director for Development and Housing), Richard Howroyd (Service Lead - Procurement and Commissioning), Martyn Sargeant (Service Director (Strategy & Governance)), George Winterbourne (Service Lead – Finance & Strategic Assets), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer (Scrutiny & Dem Services)), Councillor Iain Cottingham, Councillor Denise Gaines, Councillor Tom McCann and Councillor Vic Poole

PART I

1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Item 4 – Environment Strategy Annual Report (page 7, bullet point 4) – the Committee agreed that the need to ensure sufficient watering of newly planted trees would be recommended to the Executive. This was particularly important considering the heatwave conditions being experienced. This recommendation would be added to the actions/recommendations log.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 May 2026 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 Actions from previous Minutes

Members reviewed the actions from the previous meetings. The following point was noted:

- **270 (Grazeley Solar Farm)** – the date for the Committee to consider the Business Case for this project would need to be rearranged as the 15 September 2026 was reserved for the Thames Water/Environment Agency scrutiny.

The resolution of Committee at its meeting on 12 May 2026, that the decision made in relation to Lower Way in Thatcham would be reconsidered at ID, would be added to the actions/recommendations log.

Councillor Carolyne Culver highlighted the need for the action logs of each Scrutiny Committee to monitor progress made with scrutiny recommendations that had been agreed by the Executive.

3 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

4 Petitions

No petitions were received at the meeting.

5 Items called-in following the meeting of the Executive on 11 June 2026

a Called-in report - New Procurement Strategy and "Think Local" Social Value Strategy

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 6a) which outlined the call-in request for the Committee to review the Executive decision of 11 June 2026 to adopt the Procurement Strategy and the “Think Local” Social Value Strategy.

Councillor Vic Poole, the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, and Commercialisation, made the following points in support of the Executive’s decision:

- The new Procurement Strategy had been developed in response to the Public Procurement Act 2023, which had brought in substantial legislative changes. Because of the scale of the changes, the Council had started from scratch in preparing the Strategy.
- The Strategy was an overarching document touching many areas of the Council’s business. Councillor Poole advised that further metrics and delivery detail would follow as implementation progressed.

The following points were made by Councillor Ross Mackinnon, one of the call-in Members:

- He stated that the previous Social Value Policy had been adopted when he was Portfolio Holder and expressed concern that comments made at Executive had suggested that this earlier Policy had not been taken into account or given any weight in forming the new Strategy.
- The Committee needed to be satisfied that the previous Policy had been taken into account, that it had been complied with and that the new Strategy properly explained how it built on or replaced the earlier position.
- It was important to demonstrate that procurement decisions had been and would be made in accordance with policy. Without this there was a risk to the Council of legal challenge.
- It was important, for monitoring purposes, to be able to identify the level of local spend, how local spend was defined, the extent of local suppliers and the targets being set. This would enable scrutiny to take place.
- Call-in Members requested that the new Strategy be strengthened prior to final adoption with assurance provided on the points that had been raised.

Councillor Poole and Richard Howroyd (Service Lead – Procurement and Commissioning) made the following points in response to those comments:

- Councillor Poole explained that information was held in relation to targets and data. It had been included within Appendix 1 of the Procurement Strategy. Mr Howroyd added that Appendix 1 contained a summary of local spend, regional spend and spend by category/service area.
- Mr Howroyd had introduced a detailed spend analysis system since joining the Council which allowed expenditure to be analysed by individual supplier, category and other criteria. Further information on this could be provided to the Committee.

- Councillor Poole went on to state that over the previous three years the Council's spend with small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) had been around 50%, which compared favourably to the local government average of 34%. Spend with local SMEs was in the region of 14% and there was a target to increase that to 20%.
- In response to the point on legal challenge, Councillor Poole pointed out that it was necessary to regularly adapt to legislative change, and the new Strategy was produced on that basis. Training and more detailed delivery arrangements would follow, this would be outlined in the Delivery Plan.
- Mr Howroyd added that the Council's approach to increasing local spend was also driven by national agendas and the Federation of Small Businesses. He explained the aim to maximise value at a local level and achieve benefits to the local economy.
- Councillor Poole then responded to the concern that the Procurement Strategy presented to the Executive was incomplete and missing the Executive Summary. She explained that the Executive Summary heading had been removed as the foreword to the Strategy already provided a sufficient summary of the document. She added that the "Think Local" Social Value Strategy was based on the significant legislative changes described and the previous policy needed to be updated. The new Strategy included the creation of a social value grant fund intended to improve community access to social value commitments.

A number of points were then discussed in the debate and made in response to further questions.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj commented that the Procurement Strategy was listed on the Executive Forward Plan when the Forward Plan was considered at a previous Committee, but he could not recall any suggestion that it be considered at scrutiny in advance of the Executive. He considered that some of the points highlighted with this call-in could have been discussed and resolved at the Executive meeting.

Councillor Carolyne Culver made the point that the detail included in the Forward Plan was limited and in many cases, did not provide information on an item beyond the report title. The call-in of reports was an option open to Members once the report had been published for the Executive, the detail made clear and the decision made.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon agreed and stated that the call-in process was a fundamental part of local democracy. He raised concern that the ability to ask questions at the Executive was limited and therefore needed to be raised at scrutiny.

Councillor Culver observed that there was a distinction between the formal scrutiny undertaken by scrutiny committees and the lighter-touch scrutiny that took place elsewhere in other forums.

Councillor Pattenden agreed it was right for Members to have the ability to call-in decisions, but it would be beneficial for scrutiny to take place before Executive where possible so that scrutiny could make a useful contribution prior to decisions.

Councillor Richard Somner noted the target to increase spend on local suppliers to 20%, but asked for further detail on the targets set for the Strategy. In response, Mr Howroyd described ongoing work to identify benchmark figures for comparison in order to identify meaningful targets. This would be updated through the Delivery Plan and referenced in future performance reports.

Mr Howroyd then advised of the first "Meet the Buyer" event, noting that it had received very positive feedback from local suppliers and had included cross-party attendance. They said this feedback was being reviewed and would help shape future work on supplier engagement.

Councillors Jeremy Cottam and Erik Pattenden referred to the point made in the call-in request which implied that the Executive had acted unconstitutionally. They did not feel this was the case.

Councillor Mackinnon replied that he had not stated that the decision was unconstitutional, rather he held concerns that constitutional principles of decision-making had not been adhered to, given the apparent lack of scrutiny. Specifically, he pointed out that no Executive member had identified the omission of the Executive Summary in the Strategy when it was approved.

Councillor Chris Read spoke in support of the Strategy. It was important to have it in place in response to the changing legislation. It was also important to have a positive relationship with suppliers. Councillor Read did not accept that the Strategy lacked targets and baseline data, noting that these were in place. He did not support referring the Strategy back to the Executive. He looked forward to receiving updates on the implementation of the Strategy and the Delivery Plan at future meetings.

Finally, Councillor Read queried the point made in the call-in request that the Council should aim to aggressively increase local spend, he did not feel this was necessary. In response, Councillor Somner held the view that there was no issue in seeking to do so. What was important, when attempting to increase local spend, was to ensure there were clear targets to work towards. He acknowledged the points made by Mr Howroyd on the work to gain clarity on baseline figures and set targets.

Councillor Howard Woollaston highlighted that the extraordinary meeting of the Executive held on 11 June 2026 consisted of a number of agenda items, but extraordinary meetings did not allow for formal questions from either the public or Members. Councillor Mackinnon supported this point. He added that prevention of scrutiny at the Executive would likely result in the need to consider calling-in items.

Councillor Mackinnon then asked for clarity on whether the previous social value policy had actually been applied in procurement decisions, and whether there was a risk of supplier challenge.

Mr Howroyd replied that, as far as he was aware, the previous social value policy had been applied. He also stated that while there was always room for improvement, the Council's procurement procedures and responses to legal challenge were robust and good quality control mechanisms were in place. He pointed to the recent award of the major highways contract where procurement procedures were robustly followed.

Mr Howroyd continued by stating that there was always some risk of legal challenge in procurement, but they did not see social value in itself as a key area of challenge.

Councillor Poole added that, to the best of her knowledge, the previous social value policy had been applied in all relevant procurements. In her time as Portfolio Holder, she had reviewed previous tender packs and social value had been a consideration in those. She had also spoken to procurement officers and received confirmation that the social value policy had been adhered to.

Councillor Mackinnon then proposed that the decision be referred back to the Executive for reconsideration. The Executive should be asked to revise the Procurement Strategy before final adoption to include clearer reference to the previous social value policy, measurable targets within the strategy, and details of regular reporting to scrutiny on the achievement of the social value aims.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Somner.

The proposal was not approved by the Committee. It was therefore resolved that the decision of the Executive would stand.

RESOLVED that the Executive decision of 11 June 2026, to adopt the Procurement Strategy and the "Think Local" Social Value Strategy, would stand.

Discussion then turned to the point made in relation to the holding of extraordinary meetings. Councillor Culver felt that the Committee could make a proposal to the Executive to limit the use of extraordinary and/or emergency meetings.

This was supported by Councillor Mackinnon. He gave the view that such meetings should only be held to consider genuinely urgent items. Non-urgent items should go to an ordinary Executive meeting where formal questions could be asked of Executive Members.

Councillor Pattenden felt that pre-decision scrutiny should be enhanced from reviewing the Forward Plan. Further information could be requested on forthcoming items if needed.

Councillor Amirtharaj noted that it was sometimes necessary to hold extraordinary meetings and did not want to seek to limit the Executive's ability to call such meetings.

Councillor Read made the point that a number of extraordinary Executive meetings had been arranged in previous years, including under previous Administrations. He did however agree that it would be useful to obtain guidance on the current rules for calling such meetings so that Members had more clarity.

Councillor Culver proposed that the Committee should ask for greater clarity on the criteria for holding extraordinary Executive meetings, and discourage their overuse. This was seconded by Councillor Somner and, at the vote, the proposal was carried.

RESOLVED that greater clarity would be requested on the criteria for holding extraordinary Executive meetings, and the overuse of such meetings would be discouraged.

b Called-in report - Planning Enforcement Plan 2026

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 6b) which outlined the call-in request for the Committee to review the Executive decision of 11 June 2026 to adopt the Planning Enforcement Plan 2026.

Councillor Denise Gaines, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing, made the following points in support of the Executive's decision:

- An enforcement plan was not a statutory requirement, but it was a useful tool to guide enforcement investigations and ensure that actions taken were both consistent and transparent.
- The plan had been refreshed and modified in order to update the priority classifications so that officer effort could be focused on the most significant breaches in a timelier way. Cases were prioritised into four categories:
    - **Category 1 – Urgent Action**: initial assessment within two working days, in cases where there was a risk of substantial and irreversible impacts on the environment and/or local community.
    - **Category 2 – High priority**: initial assessment within 15 working days, covering alleged breaches of planning control where there was a risk of significant impacts on the environment and/or significant public interest.
    - **Category 3 – Standard priority**: initial assessment within 40 working days, covering alleged breaches where there was a risk of planning harm, and likely to include the majority of cases, such as household developments, fences, walls and gates.

- **Category 4 – Low priority**: over 40 working days or not expedient to investigate, covering the least harmful and lowest-level matters. The initial assessment would largely be desk-based.

Councillor Gaines stated that all cases would receive some level of investigation via the initial assessment. There would not be a case of permanent inaction as had been suggested in the reasons for call-in.

The following points were made by the call-in Members:

- It was fully accepted that planning enforcement cases needed prioritisation when considering the enforcement workload and budget constraints. However, it was important to be transparent with residents on the timeframe for a case to be reviewed, particularly if it was assessed as being Category 4. An appropriate level of communication needed to take place with residents, including if the decision was made to not pursue a case.
- There was concern that it was not specified whether Category 4 cases would receive an initial assessment and that some could be assessed as not being expedient to investigate. The desktop analysis might not be sufficiently thorough, particularly if mapping tools were not kept up to date.
- This lower level response could result in residents not coming forward to report planning breaches and lead to further breaches.
- The point was made that planning enforcement formed a major part of a Councillor's casework.
- It was not felt appropriate to have brought this item to an extraordinary Executive.

Councillor Gaines made the following points in response to those comments:

- She reiterated that all reported matters would receive an initial assessment. This consideration provided a level of investigation and cases would be categorised from there. Councillor Gaines did not expect many cases to be Category 4.
- She felt the revised plan provided a greater level of transparency and was more detailed than the version produced in 2022. It therefore provided a greater level of information for residents and outlined the different timescales for a response. This helped to address points made in the public consultation for a greater level of information, such as on timescales.

A number of points were then discussed in the debate and made in response to further questions.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj agreed with the point that a significant proportion of a councillors' casework involved helping residents with planning enforcement matters. He was pleased to note that the revised Enforcement Plan gave a greater level of clarity to residents on service expectations.

Councillor Amirtharaj praised the excellent job being done by the Council's Enforcement Officers, but queried whether there would be adequate resources to meet the timescales in the Plan, particularly for higher category cases. He also highlighted the importance of keeping residents informed on actions to be taken and timescales following the initial assessment.

In response, Councillor Gaines explained that setting fixed timescales for subsequent action was difficult as the action required depended on the nature of the breach. However, further information could be accessed on an enforcement case on the planning portal. In terms of resource levels, a Compliance Officer had recently been appointed and a team manager was in post.

Councillor Eric Pattenden considered that the new strategy represented an improvement as it would enable the prioritisation of serious breaches and the response to them. He was supportive of the new Enforcement Plan.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam queried whether there would be instances where breaches were not investigated. Councillor Gaines replied that every case would receive an initial assessment. However, some Category 4 cases would not receive a fuller investigation if they did not constitute a breach or was not considered to constitute any harm. A case could however be recategorised if additional information came to light.

Councillor Carolyne Culver queried the inclusion of traffic hazards within Category 2 as she felt these should be treated with a greater level of urgency, while acknowledging that Highways could respond in advance of planning enforcement action. Councillor Gaines stated her expectation that if a breach created a danger to the public then it would likely be treated as a Category 1 matter.

Councillor Richard Somner asked whether the categorisation could be added to the planning portal in order to enhance the data available. Councillor Gaines felt this could be incorporated.

Councillor Mackinnon sought further clarification on those cases that would be assessed only and those that would be investigated. He felt this point lacked clarity, particularly for Category 4 matters.

Councillor Gaines replied that a desktop analysis would be conducted for all cases. She felt this initial assessment constituted a form of investigation. As already stated, a Category 4 case could be given a higher category and subject to a fuller investigation. Councillor Mackinnon felt this needed greater clarification within the Plan.

Laura Callan, Interim Service Director for Development and Housing, clarified that the intention behind Category 4 had been to capture very minor cases and, in some of those cases, it was the expectation that there would be no enforcement breach or a concern did not cause harm. The desktop assessment would be undertaken in all cases at the initial stage. She acknowledged that the wording could be updated to aid clarification and provide a clearer distinction between initial assessment and further investigation.

Councillor Mackinnon then proposed that the decision be referred back to the Executive for reconsideration. He proposed that the Committee should recommend that the Executive publish clear guidance to explain the planning enforcement categories and the service standards to be expected for each category. It should also be made clear as to what constituted an initial assessment and what constituted an investigation. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Somner.

The proposal was not approved by the Committee. It was therefore resolved that the decision of the Executive would stand.

Councillor Somner then queried if the wording of the Plan could be updated to aid clarification as had been discussed. Councillor Culver felt it would be appropriate to make this request of the Portfolio Holder. This was agreed by the Committee. Councillor Gaines agreed this would be considered.

RESOLVED that:

- The Executive decision of 11 June 2026, to adopt the Planning Enforcement Plan 2026, would stand.
- The Committee's comments on the wording used in the Plan would be considered for inclusion by the Portfolio Holder. This included reference made to initial assessments and investigations, and information made available on the planning portal.

c Called-in report - Assets Optimisation Plan

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 6c) which outlined the call-in request for the Committee to review the Executive decision of 11 June 2026 to approve the Asset Optimisation Plan.

Councillor Tom McCann, Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects, made the following points in support of the Executive's decision:

- He explained that the Asset Optimisation Plan formed part of a longer-term process that was already underway within the Council to maximise the use of its assets, reduce costs, increase income and secure best value.
- The production of this Plan was in line with the requirements for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).
- This was a 'business as usual' area of activity.

The following points were made by the call-in Members:

- There was concern that this document was not sufficiently transparent. Greater clarification was needed of the Council's assets, in particular those which had a local or community significance. A full schedule should be published, providing an explanation of the intention for each asset. If this information could not be published in full, then the reasons why should be explained. The Council should be open on their plans for its assets so that there was public awareness.
- The Committee needed assurance that decisions on significant assets would be taken through the appropriate decision-making process following a period of consultation.
- Confirmation on these steps would help to strengthen the plan.
- The membership of the Assets Board and the content of its Terms of Reference were queried.

Sarah Clarke, Executive Director for Resources, made the following points in response to those comments:

- All Council assets were within the scope of the Asset Optimisation Plan. The Plan provided a strategic framework for systematically reviewing and categorising the assets in order to identify, for example, those which were being fully utilised and those with potential for improved use. If an asset was identified as potentially surplus then consideration would be given to whether it could be reused or repurposed, or disposed of, but only if appropriate.
- The Plan did not alter the existing formal decision-making arrangements. Any actual disposal or optimisation decision requiring Executive approval would still need to go through the same constitutional and legal processes as before.
- Mrs Clarke explained that she chaired the Assets Board. Its Terms of Reference were included as part of the Executive papers of December 2025. The Board was largely formulated by officers who held relevant responsibilities across the Council, with Member representation from Councillor Heather Codling. Its role was to provide cross-Council oversight and ensure a strategic view of assets.
- Particular categories of assets were afforded protection, such as community and heritage assets, and would not be disposed of. Government guidance connected to EFS had also made clear that such assets should be protected.

A number of points were then discussed in the debate and made in response to further questions.

Councillor Antony Amartharaj noted the concerns raised in the call-in request, particularly in the current financial climate. However, these concerns had been addressed. There

was no 'blank cheque' for the disposal or repurposing of an asset without the required Member involvement. He was reassured, by the comments made by Mrs Clarke, which explained that the Plan provided a strategic approach for the management of the Council's assets and a way to firstly categorise/prioritise them and then identify if any further action could be taken on an asset. The Plan was really about categorisation and prioritisation rather than automatic disposal.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon agreed this had been useful clarification. It had been explained that all assets were within the scope of the Plan, there was no 'blank cheque' approach to be taken with the assets and the required approval routes would continue to be followed for any disposals. He added his view that if this discussion and clarification had been provided at the Executive, then the call-in might not have been necessary.

Councillor Mackinnon therefore proposed to withdraw the call-in and to allow the Executive's decision to stand. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Somner. The proposal was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Executive decision of 11 June 2026, to approve the Asset Optimisation Plan, would stand.

6 2025/26 Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn

The Committee considered the Financial Performance Provisional Outturn Report for 2025/26 (Agenda Item 7).

Councillor Iain Cottingham (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources) explained that the report covered both the revenue and capital outturn positions for 2025/26 and stressed that the figures remained provisional pending approval by the Council's external auditors.

The provisional revenue outturn showed an overspend of £5.5m which equated to a 3% adverse variance. This position was primarily driven by social care demand pressures.

For Adult Social Care, the Committee was advised that there was an overspend of £3m. Councillor Cottingham advised that a major element of this related to the original budget assumption that the Council would dispose of its own care homes during the year. As that had not happened, this gave rise to a £2.1m adverse variance within the service. There was also an overspend of approximately £1 million on short-term and long-term services.

For Children's Social Care, the overspend was £3.6m, of which £3.3m related to high cost placements. A further pressure of £1m had arisen in relation to the cost of childcare lawyers.

Councillor Cottingham also reported that £9.1m of the £10.7m savings programme had been achieved, representing delivery of 85% against the savings target.

Turning to the capital programme, Councillor Cottingham stated that capital expenditure for the year totalled £44.5m against a planned programme of £60.9m. He advised that this reflected rephasing of expenditure rather than wholesale cancellation of projects, with some schemes slipping into future years and some expenditure also being brought forward from previous years.

Councillor Cottingham commented that the Council historically achieved around a 70–75% spend rate against the capital programme per annum and efforts to improve the level of delivery were being pursued.

Councillor Cottingham then highlighted a reduction in the Council's expected Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) requirement. He stated that this would be in region of £16m to £17m rather than the £20m previously projected.

Questions followed from the Committee. The following points were noted in response:

- If an asset was sold, it would come off the Council's balance sheet and generate a capital receipt which could then be used for future investment including transformation activity.
- Councillor Cottingham agreed that further detail could be provided to help clarify the changes between the provisional outturn position before mitigations (£9.4m overspend) and the position post mitigations (£5.5m). However, he explained that a major factor had been a thorough review of legacy accruals on the balance sheet, particularly in social care.
- It was explained that the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) adjustment (£5.1m) was a planned annual adjustment made in accordance with the Council's MRP policy. This resulted in a deduction from the General Fund and a transfer into capital reserves. This would also impact on the EFS requirement.
- Councillor Cottingham agreed to provide further detail on the £4.3m of transformation expenditure funded through the flexible use of capital receipts, including the amount spent on each project.
- It was confirmed that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding of £1.1m had been allocated to the Faraday Road football ground for 2026/27 and there was no need to access alternative funding. The decision to allocate CIL funding was taken following a review of the business case. The project met the criteria for the use of CIL funding.

Councillor Howard Woollaston voiced his concern at the total levels of expenditure on the Faraday Road project and felt this should be reviewed. Councillor Culver felt that this was an item to potentially consider for the Work Programme.

Actions:

- **Councillor Cottingham agreed to provide further detail on the £4.3m of transformation expenditure funded through the flexible use of capital receipts, including the amount spent on each project.**
- **A review of the expenditure on the Faraday Road project would be considered for the Work Programme.**

RESOLVED to note the provisional outturn report on the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets.

7 2025/26 Performance Report Q4

The Committee considered the Quarter 4 Performance Report for 2025/26 (Agenda Item 8).

Councillor Vic Poole (Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, and Commercialisation) introduced the report, which would also be reviewed by the Executive on 2 July 2026.

Prior to opening the item up for questions, Councillor Poole explained that while she would provide an answer to as many questions as possible, it might prove necessary to provide answers in relation to other portfolios post the meeting.

Councillor Carolyne Culver noted that the target for the measure 'go live with Grazeley Solar Farm' showed as December 2025. She asked when this would be updated.

Councillor Poole explained that the report retained the original target date. Any subsequent changes were outlined within the report commentary.

Councillor Antony Amirtharaj felt that greater clarity was needed in the report to explain why, in some cases, the year-end RAG rating was reported as 'Green', but the area of work appeared to still be in progress. Councillor Poole explained that an item would only be marked as completed when it was delivered. Until then, it would be reported as RAG. Some measures would continue to be tracked over a rolling period and would therefore remain live rather than becoming a completed project.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon noted that a number of 'Red' indicators were being reported, making specific reference to indicators within the Portfolio of Children and Family Services. He queried whether an action plan was in place in order to make improvements for 'Red' indicators and who was responsible for these.

Councillor Poole confirmed that individual officers were responsible for the various KPIs. She pointed out that stretched targets were in place as the Council strove to reach a higher standard than that required nationally or by comparator local authorities. While Councillor Mackinnon commended this ambition, he stated that performance in these areas still needed to be taken into account and scrutinised.

Councillor Poole noted that Councillor Mackinnon had submitted a question to the Leader of the Council for the Executive meeting on 2 July 2026 in relation to the mechanism for improving performance in areas rated as 'Red'. It was therefore agreed that a fuller response would be provided at that meeting.

Councillor Culver queried progress in meeting the indicator for pothole repairs. She noted that Members had previously been told that West Berkshire had a green national rating for pothole repairs, however performance was rated as 'Red' in the report. She queried why this was the case when the national picture suggested that the authority was performing well in this area. Councillor Poole understood that the 'Red' status in the report was linked to a period during which adverse weather conditions had prevented repairs from being made within the required timeframe. The status of this measure was about delivery of particular repairs and was regardless of the positive external assessment of the standard of the Council's total road network.

Sarah Clarke added that her understanding was the same as Councillor Poole. I.e. that severe weather had affected the Council's ability to respond to the number of potholes within the required quarter, meaning that the indicator could not be recovered within the year-end reporting window. This was regardless of the fact that performance in subsequent quarters had returned to the planned target level.

Councillor Mackinnon returned to the discussion on the Grazeley Solar Farm and asked when the decision would be made on whether the scheme would proceed or not. Councillor Poole would direct this question to the relevant Portfolio Holder and ask them to provide a response to Councillor Mackinnon.

Councillor Mackinnon felt this highlighted the need for Portfolio Holders to be present at meetings in order to answer questions on the night.

RESOLVED that:

- The progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027 be noted.
- Those areas where performance was below target had been reviewed by the Committee and remedial action noted.

8 Task and Finish Group Guidance

The Committee considered the draft guidance document for scrutiny task and finish groups (Agenda Item 9).

Martyn Sargeant (Service Director for Strategy and Governance) introduced the report (an updated version was tabled at the meeting which included comments from Councillor Carolyne Culver as Chairman). He explained that it had been developed to provide a clear framework for conducting scrutiny task and finish groups and was based on the good practice guidance produced by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

The document, subject to any input from this meeting, would be recommended for approval at the Council meeting on 16 July 2026.

Mr Sargeant advised, in response to a query from Councillor Antony Amirtharaj, that the guidance was not a legal or statutory document. Rather, it served as a good practice document which would form part of the Council's Constitution.

Councillor Richard Somner highlighted the need to be mindful when formatting documents. He stated that it was preferable to highlight amended text rather than present it in a different colour as this made it more accessible for all readers.

Councillor Culver queried whether former Executive Members could participate in task and finish groups. A concern had been raised as to whether this prevented Councillors with relevant expertise from contributing on a subject. Sarah Clarke (Executive Director for Resources) responded that former Executive Members were not permitted to participate in a scrutiny review of a particular project if they were on the Executive, and therefore a decision maker, at the time that decisions were taken on the matter. This point was clarified within the Constitution. Advice could however be sought from the Monitoring Officer if clarification was needed in individual cases.

Councillor Chris Read queried whether it was necessary for all scrutiny recommendations to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) and whether it was enough to say a recommendation was practical. He felt it was a task and finish group's role to develop sensible and workable recommendations, it was then for the Executive to response to the recommendations and consider whether they were SMART. Mr Sargeant responded that this change could be recommended to Council if it was agreed by the Committee.

Councillor Culver felt there was a need for flexibility. For example, setting a timeframe within a recommendation could result in it being rejected if the Executive felt this was unrealistic.

Mr Sargeant clarified that 'success metrics' referred broadly to setting clear objectives for the review and the standards against which success would be judged. Councillor Ross Mackinnon suggested 'success criteria' as being more appropriate.

Councillor Mackinnon then highlighted section 6 and the statement that all Members on the task group would need to be in agreement for a recommendation to be taken forward. He queried if agreement could be based on the majority view. Councillor Culver gave her agreement on this point, the task group minutes could indicate where approval had not been unanimous. Mr Sargeant felt this wording could be updated.

RESOLVED that an amended version of the guidance document would be forwarded to Council for consideration. Amendments included revisions to the requirements for SMART targets, clarity on success metrics or criteria, and to allow for recommendations to be approved by the majority of Members on a task group.

9 Appointment of Task and Finish Groups

The potential to form a task group to consider the Council's budget setting processes was again raised. Terms of Reference had been drafted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and these had been commented on by Councillor Carolyne Culver.

Councillor Culver stated that budget scrutiny should be undertaken on an ongoing basis. The task group should concentrate its efforts with a forward look on the budget and consideration should be given to best practice employed elsewhere in budget setting.

Action:

- **The Terms of Reference for the Council's budget setting processes would be finalised and provided to the Committee for consideration.**

10 Task and Finish Group Updates

This item was not discussed.

11 Executive Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Council's Forward Plan for the period up to 31 August 2026 (Agenda Item 12).

The potential to scrutinise items in advance of Executive consideration was discussed. Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that the Forward Plan lacked detail on upcoming items making it difficult to form a view on items that could come to scrutiny. The full detail was generally not known until the Executive agenda was published and this increased the potential for items being called-in.

Sarah Clarke (Executive Director for Resources) acknowledged that the level of detail could be enhanced. She also felt there was scope to tailor the document for each Scrutiny Committee.

A meeting was to be arranged between Councillor Carolyne Culver, Sarah Clarke and Clare Lawrence (Executive Director for Place) to discuss potential items for the Committee's Work Programme.

Councillor Chris Read felt that this meeting should include a discussion on upcoming plans and strategies, and those in progress, for the Work Programme. An example could be the Delivery Plan for Asset Optimisation.

Councillor Culver felt that discussions between Scrutiny Members and Executive Members would be beneficial. Sarah Clarke explained that this was a matter she would discuss with the Leader of the Council.

Action:

- **Sarah Clarke would discuss, with the Leader of the Council, the potential for Scrutiny and Executive Members to meet to identify items for future scrutiny review.**

12 Corporate Programme

The Committee considered the Corporate Programme (Agenda Item 13).

Following on from the discussion on the Executive Forward Plan, Members felt it would be useful for the Corporate Programme to contain further detail to help the Committee identify those projects that could be reviewed by scrutiny.

Sarah Clarke agreed to take this point away for consideration. She would also advise on whether the project for the Faraday Road Football Ground would be included in the document.

Action:

- **Sarah Clarke would seek to include further detail within the Corporate Programme. She would also advise on the Faraday Road Football Ground project.**

13 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee considered its Work Programme (Agenda Item 14).

The arrangements for the Thames Water/Environment Agency scrutiny on 15 September 2026 were discussed. An earlier start time of 5.30pm was agreed to allow sufficient time for debate.

Questions would be put to the reporting organisations in advance, but there would also be scope to ask questions at the meeting. Councillor Jeremy Cottam highlighted that clarification was needed on the ownership of the Thatcham sewage plant.

The Work Programme would be discussed in more detail at the offline meeting that had already been referred to. This would include consideration of the following items:

- Broadband coverage in rural areas
- Business Support Review
- Transformation updates
- Public Protection Partnership
- Faraday Road Football Ground – levels of expenditure incurred and the impact of that
- Delivery Plan for Asset Optimisation

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

CHAIRMAN …….

Date of Signature …….