

DRAFT

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

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 29 JANUARY 2026

Councillors Present: Tony Vickers (Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Jeff Brooks, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Carlyne Culver, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Owen Jeffery, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Tom McCann, Biyi Oloko, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, and Martha Vickers

Also Present: Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Nicola Thomas (Deputy Monitoring Officer and Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services), Melanie Booth (Group Executive – Liberal Democrats), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Thomas Radbourne (Zoom Host), Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, and Honorary Alderman Graham Pask

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Nick Carter, Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, Councillor Owen Jeffrey, Councillor Matt Shakespeare, Councillor Dennis Benneyworth, Councillor Paul Kander, Councillor Dominic Boeck, Councillor Ross Mackinnon, Councillor Howard Woollaston, Councillor Richard Somner, Councillor Clive Hooker, Councillor Joanne Stewart, Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Jane Langford

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

2. Requisition to the Chairman of Council

The Council considered the points made concerning requisition to Council to discuss the Government's Local Government Finance Settlement (Agenda Item 3).

RECCOMENDATION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Iain Cottingham:

“The Government's Local Government Finance Settlement will leave West Berkshire Council among the hardest hit of all councils in the country.

The settlement sets out funding for councils for the next three years - up to 2028-29. While a three-year settlement will allow the Council to better plan its budgets, the figures show that West Berkshire will see one of the lowest increases in Core Spending Power nationally.

Core Spending Power being a measure used by government to show the total revenue funding a local authority has available to deliver local services through the local government finance settlement.

This includes:

- *Revenue Support Grant*
- *Retained Business Rates*

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- *Council Tax*
- *Applicable Government Grants*

West Berkshire's Core Spending Power - which assumes council tax will increase at the upper limit of 4.99% each year - will rise by just over a third of the national average. Without those projected council tax increases, the Council would have seen an actual reduction in spending power.

The Revenue Support Grant, a key source of Government funding, will fall sharply from £27 million to £16 million in just two years - almost halving in a short space of time. By 2029, the Council's core spending power will be £191 million. With inflation at 3%, the cost of essential services such as adult and children's social care, waste services and debt repayments alone would consume virtually all of this.

Because of this, Council resolves to request that the Leader:

- 1. Writes to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP, to request that the Government urgently review the proposed funding model being applied to West Berkshire Council to address the significant and unfair consequences to this Council's ability to deliver essential public services to our communities.*
- 2. Writes to our two local MPs to ask that they support our efforts and urge MHCLG to address the negative impacts of the proposed settlement on West Berkshire Council, and request that this be reviewed as a matter of urgency.*
- 3. Discusses this difficult situation with the Berkshire Unitary Authority Leaders and looks to develop a joint Berkshire wide response to this very distressing financial situation."*

Councillor Brooks introduced the grounds for the requisition, highlighting the significant financial challenges faced by the Council due to reductions in government grants and changes to the funding formula. He explained that the Council was increasingly reliant on borrowing to cover day-to-day costs, which would ultimately burden residents with repayment obligations. Councillor Brooks also emphasised that the recommendations included with the requisition were not intended to criticise the government but to make a reasoned and polite request for a review of the funding formula to ensure fairness.

Several councillors elaborated on the financial pressures, particularly in areas such as Adult Social Care and Children's Services, which were experiencing rising costs and demand. Councillor Heather Codling expressed concern about the escalating complexity of cases and the associated financial burden. She stressed that children were not to blame for the pressures and that the Council had a responsibility to ensure the system supporting them was adequately funded.

It was noted that the government's funding formula disproportionately impacted West Berkshire due to its classification as a low deprivation area, despite the Council facing significant challenges such as an ageing population, rural service delivery costs, and increasing demand for specialist care. Councillor Chris Read cited examples of residents in need, including individuals facing health challenges, housing issues, and financial difficulties, to illustrate the real-world impact of reduced funding on vulnerable populations.

Councillor Iain Cottingham provided detailed figures, explaining that the Council's funding from central government was projected to decrease by £28 million over the next three

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years. This included a reduction in the retention of business rates from 30% to 13%, which would significantly impact the Council’s income. Councillors expressed concerns that the shift undermined the Council’s ability to deliver essential services and created a disincentive for economic growth in the district.

Councillor Justin Pemberton expressed a sense of urgency and sorrow, stating that the funding settlement threatened the district’s ability to invest in its future and maintain its identity as a thriving community. Councillor Nigel Foot highlighted the potential widening of health disparities due to reduced funding, particularly in addressing pockets of deprivation and supporting vulnerable residents. Councillor Patrick Clark emphasised the challenges faced in Adult Social Care, noting the high costs of providing care in rural areas and the increasing demand for services as the population ages.

The recommendations within the requisition called for a united effort to engage with the government and local MPs to advocate for a fairer funding settlement. Councillors stressed the importance of presenting a strong, collective voice to ensure the needs of West Berkshire residents were adequately represented.

The absence of the Conservative opposition group was a significant point of discussion during the meeting. Councillor Brooks and other councillors criticised the decision of the Conservative group to boycott the meeting, describing it as a dereliction of duty and a failure to represent their constituents. It was suggested that the absence of the opposition meant that residents in their wards were not being represented in the critical discussion.

Councillor David Marsh and other Opposition Group Members questioned the timing and purpose of the meeting, suggesting that earlier action might have been more effective. However, they also criticised the Conservative group for failing to engage in the discussion.

Overall, as Council was satisfied with the report, they agreed to approve the recommendations.

The requisition was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

(The meeting commenced at 7pm and closed at 7.59pm)

CHAIRMAN
Date of Signature