

# DRAFT

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

## EXECUTIVE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 9 JUNE 2022

**Members of the Executive Present:** Councillors Lynne Doherty (Chairman), Steve Ardagh-Walter, Dominic Boeck, Ross Mackinnon, Thomas Marino, Richard Somner and Joanne Stewart

**Also Present:** Councillors Adrian Abbs, Carolyne Culver, Lee Dillon, Alan Macro, Erik Pattenden and Tony Vickers

**Members Present Remotely:** Councillors Graham Bridgman and David Marsh

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillors Howard Woollaston and Jeff Brooks

**Officers Present:** Nigel Lynn (Chief Executive), Susan Halliwell (Executive Director – People), Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Andy Sharp (Executive Director – People) and Shiraz Sheikh (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic)

### 1. Minutes

#### Leader's Remarks

Councillor Lynne Doherty congratulated Her Majesty the Queen on her Platinum Jubilee, and noted the celebrations over the preceding weekend. Councillor Doherty thanked all those involved in organising events across the district, the volunteers and communities and the teams at West Berkshire Council that made it possible.

Councillor Doherty noted the positive feedback received in relation to the Highways Team for street closures, and the Waste Team with the clear up.

Councillor Doherty commented that it was Carers Week and thanked all the carers for the work undertaken across the district.

#### Calcot Services for Children Statement

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to the morning's news story relating to Calcot Services. Councillor Boeck commented that the Council was aware of allegations reported by the media in relation to standards of care and treatment of children and young people by Calcot Services for Children.

Councillor Boeck noted that Calcot Services was a large provider in the region and that West Berkshire Council had a small number of children and young people placed with them.

He stated that as a local authority, responsibility for children and young people in the district was taken very seriously. It was reported that three children had been placed in their homes and that their social workers would be contacting them directly. Further, any children that had been placed with Calcot Services over the past three years would also be contacted.

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Councillor Boeck promised to continue to monitor the issue and to take appropriate steps, however he assured Members that there was no specific cause for concern in relation to young children in West Berkshire at the current stage.

### Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader, subject to the following amendment:

Councillor Alan Macro noted that item 87 of the minutes referred to Thatcham bypass rather than Theale bypass.

### 2. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Lee Dillon declared an interest in Agenda Item 6, as an employee of Sovereign Housing and reported that, as his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or another registrable interest, he would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

### 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. **First Homes Policy Position (EX4177)**

*(Councillor Lee Dillon left the Chamber for the duration of the item)*

Councillor Richard Somner introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 6), on behalf of Councillor Howard Woollaston. The report briefed Members on a new affordable housing product 'First Homes' introduced into national policy through a Written Ministerial Statement in May 2021, and considered West Berkshire's policy position on First Homes.

Councillor Carolyn Culver expressed concern at the future of shared ownership within such a scheme and queried whether sellers would be bound to sell to a local buyer even if interest was expressed from those further afield. Councillor Culver further queried how the Government would determine the price cap in the future, and the circumstances in which someone could sell without a discount.

Councillor Somner promised to provide a full written response but acknowledged that there was a risk to shared ownership, which meant that having a good mix of housing would be key. Councillor Somner suggested that the price cap and discount would be driven only by any downturn in the market.

Councillor Tony Vickers commented that it was a shame that the Government had failed to pilot the scheme prior to imposing it nationally. Councillor Vickers argued that the scheme was fundamentally flawed and was concerned that it had already caused a delay in the Local Plan programme and a drain on administrative resources. Councillor Vickers requested assurance that it would not impact the Sandleford development detrimentally.

Councillor Somner thanked Councillor Vickers for recognising the impact to officers. He reported that conversations were taking place with the Sandleford developers and he promised to keep Councillor Vickers updated at forthcoming meetings of the Planning Advisory Group.

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Councillor Adrian Abbs suggested that having reviewed a property website the criteria within the policy would currently suit 27 first time buyers. Councillor Abbs also suggested that the maximum joint income of £80,000 and maximum sale price of £250,000 would be beyond the budget of a large proportion of residents. Further he felt that the policy stifled mobility and was contrary to encouraging a mobile workforce.

Councillor Abbs queried whether major stock holding social landlords had been consulted to assess the impact on social mobility over the next five to ten years.

Councillor Somner agreed to respond to Councillor Abbs following the meeting.

Councillor Macro suggested that the policy should be reviewed more frequently than every five years, given the volatility in house prices and the rate of inflation.

Councillor Somner agreed that a close watch would need to be kept on the policy with a review suggested after 12 months.

Councillor Boeck seconded the report commenting that the policy would deliver first homes in West Berkshire to those that needed them most, and stating that he was fully behind the policy.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Consider the proposed policy position on First Homes in West Berkshire, and
- Agree the proposed First Homes policy at Appendix B.

**Other options considered:**

Officers have considered amending the national income threshold and the price cap but there is no evidence to suggest that a different approach is justified in West Berkshire. Officers have considered only having the national eligibility criteria but this would not be sufficient in meeting local housing need and ensuring that local first time buyers are prioritised for this type of affordable housing.

### 6. **Review of Town and Parish Engagement (EX4214)**

*(Councillor Lee Dillon returned to the Chamber)*

Councillor Graham Bridgman introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which summarised the work carried out to address and understand improvements in engagement with town and parish councils. Councillor Bridgman noted an amendment to page 4 action (c) of the improvement plan that should read Compton PC Clerk instead of Hampstead Norreys.

Councillor Bridgman commented that the District Parish Conference offered a good opportunity to develop themes mentioned within the report. He highlighted the fact that parish councils were seeking similar solutions to the voluntary and community sector in relation to such issues as safeguarding and funding. Councillor Bridgman emphasised the role of the Ward Member as a conduit between the officers of the Council and the parishes.

Councillor Tom Marino proposed the report.

Councillor Dillon commented that he was a member of Thatcham Town Council and suggested that his experience suggested that West Berkshire Council did not engage well with parishes or town councils, particularly in relation to planning matters.

Councillor Dillon criticised the improvement plan for having no targets or allocated resources.

Councillor Culver welcomed the paper and suggested that the District Parish Conference be more of a two-way process, and queried whether there was more that could be done

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with parish councils in relation to speeding issues. Councillor Culver also requested further information on how CIL monies would be shared with parish councils.

Councillor Doherty commented that parish councils were encouraged to suggest agenda items for the District Parish Conference and that it had always been a joint piece of work. Councillor Doherty suggested that Ward Members needed to encourage parish engagement.

Councillor Vickers suggested that officers should be trained in the role of the parish and town councillor.

Councillor Bridgman noted that whilst parish councils were often frustrated by speeding issues, quite often it was a police matter rather than within the council's control.

Councillor Bridgman agreed to revert to Councillor Culver in relation to the use of CIL monies.

Councillor Doherty seconded the report, thanked Sam Shepherd for the work and commented that dialogue with town and parish councils needed to continue.

### **RESOLVED that:**

Executive agree the Improvement Plan in Appendix A.

## **7. Strategic Asset Plan (EX4168)**

Councillor Ross Mackinnon proposed the report (Agenda Item 8), which requested approval of the Strategic Asset Plan.

Councillor Abbs commented that the plan did not appear well developed from an environmental perspective. He argued that there had been no environmental mitigation undertaken in relation to any of the Council's commercial properties.

Councillor Mackinnon disagreed with the comments.

Councillor Culver queried which site the £286,000 capital funding via a land release related to, whether there was any update to the joint venture scheme, and queried whether the Council still invested in the petrol station and whether it would be offloaded as incompatible with the climate emergency declaration.

Councillor Mackinnon agreed to revert to Councillor Culver in relation to the site details and joint venture scheme. In relation to the petrol station, he commented that as landlords of the site there was no guarantee that it would remain a petrol station and commented that there was no correlation to suggest the Council was invested in fossil fuels.

Councillor Vickers queried the state of the asset register and whether the plan related to strategic assets or was a strategic plan.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that the plan supported the Council's strategy overall and represented the long term aim to manage, acquire and dispose of the assets needed in order to carry out services on behalf of its residents.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that where an asset was no longer in use the Council would either seek to re-deploy that asset within the Council or dispose of it with best value for the Council Tax payer.

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In relation to a query from Councillor Erik Pattenden, Councillor Mackinnon explained that the plan had been reviewed as a consequence of presenting it as a separate stand-alone document to the Capital Programme.

Councillor Dillon suggested that recent assets sold by the Council had been in a poorly maintained state. He queried whether assets would be sold to parish council's at cost price or to make a profit.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that the Administration was very supportive of the devolution process and commented that the condition of a property would be reflected in the sale price. He further stated that the Council did not have a policy of deliberately running down an asset to hand over in a poor condition.

Councillor Somner seconded the report and commented that it had been the correct decision to create it as a stand-alone paper.

### **RESOLVED that:**

Executive approve the Strategic Asset Plan (SAP) into its suite of strategic documents.

### **Other options considered:**

The organisation could progress under the 'do nothing' option, without a formal SAP. This is not recommended, as the SAP lays out the manner in which the organisation can adopt best practice in managing its estate.

Alternative option is for the SAP to act as an annex to the Capital Strategy, which has been adopted in the past. It is important that the SAP as a document stand in its own right and so appending to another strategy is not recommended.

## **8. Residents' Survey 2021 - Key Findings (EX4200)**

Councillor Doherty proposed the report (Appendix Item 9), which presented the results of the West Berkshire Residents' Survey 2021. Cllr Doherty clarified an error on page 12 of the research report which recorded the percentage for the 16-24 year age group as 7% instead of the correct figure of 1%. It was noted that this would be revised for the published version of the report.

Councillor Doherty commented that it was important to have bought the report to Executive for the purpose of openness and transparency.

Councillor Culver suggested that it had been a lost opportunity in relation to carbon neutrality and failed to ask what action residents had done taken or what the Council could do to assist. Further there was no mention of climate emergency.

Councillor Doherty acknowledged the comment but explained that the survey had been intended to take a broad view of residents' thoughts.

Councillor Pattenden queried what the Leader felt about the 63% of residents who did not feel that the Council provided good value for money and the 67% of respondents who did not wish to speak positively about the Council.

Councillor Doherty acknowledged that there was good and bad in the report and that the perception of value for money was interesting, suggesting that a large number of people did not use the services where there was highest level of spend such as social care.

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Councillor Doherty noted that work was underway to communicate with residents to highlight the breadth of services provided by the Council.

It was noted that more could be done, but that in relation to national averages West Berkshire was still higher than most.

Councillor Abbs commented that it was concerning that 80% of residents felt that they could not influence local decisions.

Councillor Macro felt that litter was a big concern to local residents and queried whether it was related to the Council changing the street cleaning regime in previous years and suggested that the matter be re-visited.

Councillor Doherty agreed to review the issue.

Councillor Dillon commented that with not even four in ten residents feeling that the Council provided value for money, he would not be happy as the Leader.

Councillor Doherty responded by noting that there were positive and negatives within the report and it would be how the council responded to the report that would matter, forming as it did part of the delivery plan for the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Councillor Marino seconded the report noting the positives but also that more could be done.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

- Note the positive feedback provided by residents about satisfaction with the area and the Council; service improvement and prioritisation; communication and engagement; safety and feeling that they belong to the local area.
- Note that the results of the survey will be used to inform the decisions about what will be prioritised in the Council Strategy 2023-2027 and to identify further communication and engagement activities with residents, especially from the groups with lower response rates to the survey. In addition, a number of actions are already being taken in response to the feedback received.

## **9. Capital Financial Performance Report Outturn 2021/22 (EX4019)**

Nigel Lynn offered his apologies and left to attend a parish council meeting.

Councillor Mackinnon introduced and proposed the report (Agenda Item 10), noting an under spend of £10.5m. Councillor Mackinnon clarified that the projects relating to the under spend had not been lost, but delayed with a large number due to be delivered in the next financial year. Councillor Mackinnon reported that the capital programme had delivered outstanding new amenities and environmental improvements to residents.

Councillor Dillon queried whether it would be possible to have a breakdown in relation to the delayed projects detailing those with minor technical delays as opposed to those projects which had not even commenced, and the impact on resources. He further asked whether Portfolio Holders were concerned about delays.

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Councillor Mackinnon agreed to respond with the breakdown and effect on resources. He reported that he had requested a review from officers in relation to the feasibility of the capital programme each year.

Councillor Somner commented that it was always a concern when projects did not reach fruition within the expected timeframe and that within his portfolio Covid was having a long term impact both on workforce and supply chains. However projects were being progressed as quickly as they could.

Councillor Boeck noted that officers had done a good job of closing the gap, with 94% of primary age children gaining a place at a school of their first choice and 95% of secondary school children gaining a place at a school of their choice. He acknowledged that it would have been ideal to open the Keeble unit in Speenhamland School earlier to benefit children sooner, but that there had not been any impairment in education caused by the delay.

Councillor Jo Stewart noted that an upgrade to the Care Director System had been delayed, but was re-assured that officers and partners did a very thorough job to ensure a secure roll out when it occurred.

Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter noted that his portfolio was planning to introduce a food waste collection service towards the end of the year, which would have been beneficial to introduce sooner but that had been hampered by supply chain delays. He further added that again, in relation to transformation, there had been numerous challenges relating to recruitment, and vendors delaying delivery, but that ultimately work was progressing to provide an improved Council website for residents.

Councillor Abbs queried the specific financial extent that the delayed projects could cause, having regard to increased costs.

Councillor Pattenden queried that with inflation at 9% and rising, whether there was a view of the predicted extra cost on the £10m underspend.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that he was unable to provide a figure but that officers were investigating that matter.

Councillor Boeck seconded the report.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive

Approve the re-profiling of £9.4 million of expenditure from 2021/22 into financial year 2022/23 as recommended and agreed by Capital Strategy Group (CSG), as detailed at Appendix B.

### 10. **2021-22 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter 4: Provisional Outturn (EX4018)**

Councillor Mackinnon introduced the report (Agenda Item 11), which detailed the financial performance of the Council's revenue budgets. Councillor Mackinnon highlighted the 0.17% under spend of the Council's 2021-22 revenue budget which he hailed as a superb achievement reflecting the robust and tight control on the Council's finances.

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Councillor Dillon queried the lessons that could be learned in relation to income generation, and the quantity of treasury management under spend which was linked to the £10.5m of non-capital works.

Councillor Mackinnon estimated that using the Public Works Loan Board interest rate of 2% on a borrowing of £10m, would only equate to £200,000, and consequently the vast majority of the under spend was from treasury management.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that income generation possibilities needed to be looked at individually on their own merits.

Councillor Macro referred to page 255 of the agenda pack and queried how ASC modelling was 'partly funded from the release of invoice provisions made at the end of 2021 that are no longer required'.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that provision was made in advance for services which clients were expected to need. Where that expenditure was no longer required because the client did not require the service then the expenditure would not be needed and so the amount would be reversed.

Councillor Doherty seconded the report, noting that all had been living in uncertain times having just gone through two years of a pandemic, but that careful and prudent management of funds had allowed for a positive end to the financial year.

Councillor Doherty thanked Councillor Mackinnon, Andy Sharp and Joseph Holmes for the careful and prudent managing of the budget, particularly given the volatility posed by current and future adult social care reforms.

**RESOLVED that:** Executive

Note the provisional outturn of £0.2m underspend. The under spend was 0.17% of the Council's 2021-22 net revenue budget of £142m.

### **11. London Road Industrial Estate Project Refresh (EX4219)**

Councillor Mackinnon introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which represented the next stage for the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that whilst it was originally envisaged that an element of residential development would form some part of achieving financial viability of the site, recent land valuations and soft market testing had revealed instead a demand for commercial space. As such the report suggested full commercial re-development of the site by 2026 offering up to 300 jobs.

Councillor Vickers was curious that there was no provision for housing, and requested confirmation from Councillor Mackinnon that there was no intention of building residential property on the site.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that there were no plans within the current strategy to build any residential property at the site. Councillor Mackinnon commented that market conditions had changed and hence plans for the site reflected the change.



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Councillor Abbs queried how drainage and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS), would be dealt with.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that there was a highly trained team of engineers and officers who would deal with drainage and SuDS issues at the appropriate time.

Councillor David Marsh queried why there had been such a sudden decision not to build housing on a brown field site, whilst supporting development on a green field site at Sandleford.

Councillor Mackinnon responded that the site was being developed for commercial use to create high quality jobs.

Councillor Marsh queried whether car dealerships would form a part of the commercial regeneration, given the large expanse that they filled with only few employees.

Councillor Mackinnon commented that in terms of land that could be controlled on the site the aim was to create high quality commercial space with numerous high quality jobs.

Councillor Dillon queried whether the Council would entertain being the sponsor of a football stadium on the site which would be an employment provider in relation to conference facilities and venue hire.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that there would be an inadequate number of jobs created by such a proposal. Councillor Mackinnon suggested that the regeneration of the estate provided an opportunity for cross-party working in the future

Councillor Doherty seconded the report and welcomed the change of approach as a means of attracting investment to West Berkshire. Councillor Doherty referred to the launch of the new economic development website which was already attracting hundreds of views, predominantly from London, and commented that there was a real opportunity for West Berkshire to attract business from outside of the area.

### **RESOLVED that:** Executive

(a) approve revised strategic objectives for the project as follows:

By 2030, the London Road Industrial Estate programme will have achieved:

1. The sustainable economic regeneration of London Road Industrial Estate to create an appealing destination for businesses.
2. Inward investment, green economic growth and the creation of employment opportunities for local people;
3. A positive contribution to the district's carbon neutrality aspirations;

(b) approve a revised delivery strategy as set out in paragraph 6.9 and 6.10 of the report;

(c) delegate authority to Executive Director, Place in consultation with Section 151 Officer and Portfolio Holder to negotiate and restructure leases or buy back leases, and approve such agreement as necessary to secure the LRIE delivery strategy, AND that the Service

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Lead for Legal & Electoral Services shall have the delegated authority to enter to such agreements.

(d) delegate authority to Executive Director, Place in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Economic Development to select a new name for LRIE which reflects the district's carbon neutrality ambitions, following a competition involving local schools.

### 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 5.00 pm and closed at 7.45 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....