

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2024

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Iain Cottingham, Denise Gaines (Vice-Chairman), Stuart Gourley, Justin Pemberton, Louise Sturgess and Vicky Poole

Also Present: Councillors Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, Howard Woollaston and Carlyne Culver

Officers Present: Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Sam Chiverton (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice), Sarah Clarke (Service Director Strategy and Governance), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director – Children and Family Services), Joseph Holmes (Interim Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Maria Shepherd (Service Manager – Adult Social Care)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Adrian Abbs, Nigel Foot, David Marsh, Ross Mckinnon and Jo Stewart

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Local Plan Statement

Councillor Denise Gaines made a statement concerning the Local Plan. To view the speech in full please access this [link](#).

4. Public Questions

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

5. Petitions

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

6. Wraparound Care Project (EX4578)

Councillor Heather Codling introduced a report (Agenda Item 6), which outlined details about the West Berkshire Wraparound Care Programme Strategy to enable its roll out across the district.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that he was pleased to hear of the extension to the provision and queried whether the self-sustaining aspect of the scheme meant parents would have to pay. Councillor Codling advised that parents would pay anyway and that the grant aspect was to enable initial set up of the schemes.

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Councillor Carolyne Culver noted that Wraparound Care was on a list of items for Scrutiny Commission to review, and queried when it would be effective to do so. Councillor Codling advised waiting a year prior to review.

RESOLVED that:

- Executive understands the delivery plan and process for distributing these funds.

7. Provision of Care for the Elderly at Two West Berkshire Care Homes Including Dementia and Nursing (EX4529)

Councillor Patrick Clark introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 7), which informed Executive of the outcome of the tender process following the decision that the Council should exit operation of its own care homes and seek delegated authority to award the contract. Councillor Clark noted that West Berkshire Council was unusual as one of the few local authorities that owned its own care homes, with most others opting to utilise the provision of care from the private sector.

Councillor Clark commented that recommendations within the report were being proposed in order to provide an improved service to care home residents and to reduce the financial burden of the Council and taxpayer.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report and noted that the provision of care homes was expensive and the experience available in the private sector would deliver a significant saving.

Councillor Phil Barnett sought assurance from the Executive that the current dedicated staff delivering services within the care homes would be fully protected when awarding the contracts. Councillor Brooks reassured Councillor Barnett that the proposed new provider was experienced, and it was hoped was that the new staff would transfer under protected employment rights. Councillor Clark acknowledged that it was important to ensure that staff had been considered and reassured Councillor Barnett that this had been a serious consideration.

Recommendation: (Vote to be taken in Part II) Executive

- a) delegate authority to the Executive Director (Adult Social Care) in consultation with the s.151 officer and portfolio holder to award the contract in relation to the services to be provided at Willows Edge and Birchwood care homes to the successful bidder;
- b) delegate authority to the Service Lead Legal & Democratic Services in consultation with the Executive Director (Adult Social Care) to:
 - finalise the terms of the agreement as set out in the tender documents and to make any necessary drafting or other amendments (such amendments shall not be substantial or material) to the terms of the agreement necessary to produce a final agreement for execution and to enter into that agreement; and
 - finalise and enter into appropriate leases and/or subleases, and appropriate documentation to record A2 Dominion's consent to the grant of a sublease, required for the contractor's occupancy of each property managed by the contractor under the contract for services.

8. Medium Term Financial Strategy and Revenue Budget 2025-26 planning (EX4593)

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced a report (Agenda Item 8), which set out the financial planning assumptions for the four years ahead over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Councillor Cottingham noted that costs continued to exceed the rates at which the Council was able to increase its revenues and that there

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had been significant increase in Children's Social Care due to the complexity of demand, and rising costs in Adult Social Care.

It was highlighted that the latest forecast projected a £2m overspend, with reserves remaining static at £4m, but that the Strategy aimed to increase resilience and build the reserves to £9m by the end of the financial year. Councillor Cottingham noted that all was being done to avoid the risk of the Council seeking exceptional financial support from the Government.

Councillor Cottingham highlighted an error in table 6.4 on page 48 of the Agenda Pack, noting that 'Proposals delivered through efficiency, transformation and income that did not require consultation' should have been recorded as £3.7m, and 'Proposals that require consultation with service users and the public' £1.2m.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that page 49 of the Agenda Pack detailed the savings measures for which the Executive proposed to consult residents. It was noted that the consultation was a necessary annual process which the Executive took seriously. Councillor Brooks explained that Executive was concerned to avoid Government support as this would lead to Government interference in the decision-making processes of the Council.

In response to a query from Councillor Carlyne Culver, Councillor Brooks confirmed that any extra financial support would need to be repaid, in addition to the wages of the external staff that would be appointed to help manage the finances.

Councillor Culver referred to the proposal to remove Downland Sports Centre from the leisure contract and noted that The Downs School had been contacted only three weeks prior to inform them of the general consultation process. Councillor Culver noted that there were plans to build an additional 200 houses in the area which would potentially lead to an increased demand for the site. It was requested that more details relating to the outreach programme be included prior to consultation. Councillor Culver noted that the impact study had been written in March 2023, yet discussions between the Council and school discussing the refurbishment of the facility had continued after that date, which had confused the school. Councillor Cottingham explained that the date on the template was misleading, and reflected the date that the template had been created rather than completed.

Councillor Brooks commented that it had been the intention of the Executive to discuss the proposal with the school prior to the meeting and that he would investigate why that had not occurred. It was clarified that the sports hall would remain for the school to make use of, and that the decision related to its continued use as a Council Sports Centre. Councillor Culver acknowledged that whilst the building would remain, substantial capital involvement would not progress which the school had intended to use as part of the plans for the site.

Councillor Dominic Boeck supported the Executive's approach to make savings rather than seek Government support.

Referring to Downland Sports Centre, Councillor Boeck reiterated concerns that communities outside Newbury and Thatcham appeared to have been forgotten. Councillor Brooks responded that the Sports Centre was currently only used by two members of the community. Councillor Boeck expressed his concern for the rural communities in West Berkshire suggesting that they were poorly served. Councillor Culver noted that she had received statistics for 2022/23 which recorded 9,093 visits to the facility, which indicated more than two members.

Councillor Boeck sought clarification on the proposal to invite band G and H properties to donate to a Council led charity. Councillor Cottingham advised that the proposal was to

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invite people in these bands to donate money to a council led charity, which was based on a similar scheme which generated between three and four hundred thousand pounds for Westminster Council.

Councillor Boeck suggested that Westminster and West Berkshire were very different financially and sought clarification as to whether the scheme would supplement the Council's budget. Councillor Cottingham advised that it would become a source of revenue if taken up. Councillor Boeck queried why the scheme was restricted to band G and H properties. Councillor Cottingham clarified that it was an initial trial to understand resident appetite.

In response to a query from Councillor Richard Somner it was clarified that blue light services were a statutory consultee on matters such as street lighting.

Councillor Richard Somner queried whether road gritting had been explored as an area of devolution, to allow parishes to contribute toward the gritting of specific roads. Councillor Brooks agreed to review the suggestion. Councillor Stuart Gourley clarified that the proposal to reduce winter gritting was based on the Council's investment in temperature sensors which used artificial intelligence to measure the temperature of the roads and would provide a benchmark in the future for more tactical gritting.

Councillor Howard Woollaston noted the proposal to discontinue the mobile library and sought assurance that there was a volunteer system working to service those residents that were housebound. Councillor Cottingham confirmed that improving and enhancing the voluntary service was a significant priority for the administration.

RESOLVED that: Executive is informed of the consultation timescales and the financial planning assumptions contained within the report.

9. Members' Questions

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

10. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006. Rule 8.10.4 of the Constitution also refers.

11. Provision of Care for the Elderly at Two West Berkshire Care Homes Including Dementia and Nursing (EX4529)

(Paragraph 3 – information relating to financial/business affairs of particular person)

The Executive considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 11), which informed Executive of the outcome of the tender process following the decision that the Council should exit operation of its own care homes and seek delegated authority to award the contract.

RESOLVED that: the recommendations in the exempt report be agreed.

Other options considered:

- Do nothing – this would mean the council would continue to overspend and not achieve best value for money.
- Tender as a single lot – this risks limiting the range of potential bidders.
- Procure a fixed price annual service contract – this is unlikely to be attractive to market providers as revenue upside is limited.

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- Procure an operator/operators to take over operations, including a commercial rent on the properties – although this would generate additional revenue, lease negotiations will add complexity and potentially limit suppliers.
- Procure an operator/operators to take over operations, with lease agreements with a peppercorn rent.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature