

DRAFT

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

COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER 2025

Councillors Present: Adrian Abbs, Antony Amirtharaj, Phil Barnett, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Nick Carter, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Carlyne Culver, Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Clive Hooker, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Matt Shakespeare, Richard Somner, Stephanie Steevenson (Vice-Chairman), Joanne Stewart, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, Tony Vickers (Chairman) and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director - Children's Services), Joseph Holmes (Interim Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director - Place), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director (Resources)), Dave Wraight (Service Manager - Youth Offending Team), Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager), Councillor Tom McCann and Thomas Radbourne (Zoom host)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Dennis Benneyworth, Councillor Owen Jeffery, Councillor Paul Kander, Councillor Jane Langford, Councillor Janine Lewis, Councillor Geoff Mayes, Councillor Biyi Oloko, Honorary Alderwoman Hilary Cole, Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Adrian Edwards, Honorary Alderman Graham Jones, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones, Honorary Alderman Alan Law, Honorary Alderman Gordon Lundie and Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles

PART I

1. Chairman's Remarks

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman reported that they had attended 31 events since the last Council meeting on 17 July 2025. Specifically, the Chairman highlighted his attendance at the ABC (Assist Berkshire Children) to Read concert held in Reading. This charity did much excellent work, including with schools, to help develop literacy skills for children and young people.

The Chairman also took the opportunity to highlight a concern that the Council Chairman was not receiving invitations to events to which Mayors of other areas were being invited. He was particularly concerned that events being held in rural areas of West Berkshire were not being attended by the Council. This was an issue he was seeking to rectify.

The Vice-Chairman highlighted her attendance at the nominations evening for the King's Award for Voluntary Services. 15 certificates were presented to Berkshire organisations nominated for an award. The Vice-Chairman highlighted that this was a particularly enjoyable event at which she was pleased to hear about a wide range of voluntary work that was taking place.

The Chairman reminded Members to consider the charities operating in their wards who could be nominated in future.

2. Minutes

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Billy Drummond:

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"That the Minutes of the meetings held on 17 July 2025 and 11 September 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman."

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

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Chris Read declared an interest in Agenda Item 5 (black bin collections petition) by virtue of the fact that he worked for a large sustainable packaging company that relied upon a market of recycled cardboard fibre. However, it did not, to his knowledge, directly trade with the Council, although it did have a commercial relationship with companies like Veolia. He stated that this personal interest would not influence his thoughts and decisions on what was best for the residents of West Berkshire. Councillor Read therefore reported that, as his interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

Councillor Denise Gaines highlighted, for transparency purposes, a relevant matter in relation to Agenda Item 10 by virtue of the fact that she was previously on the Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Steering Group. However, she had stood down from this role over two years ago and since that time the NDP had been subject to independent Examination. Councillor Gaines therefore reported that she had no personal or any other interest to declare, and she determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

Following advice from the Monitoring Officer for those Members in receipt of a Local Government Pension, Councillors Phil Barnett, Jeff Brooks, Billy Drummond, Denise Gaines and Tony Vickers declared an interest in Agenda Item 12 (Motion e). They reported that as their interest was a personal interest and not an other registrable interest nor a disclosable pecuniary interest, they determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

4. Petitions

Councillor Phil Barnett presented a petition containing 50 signatures requesting a pedestrian crossing on Hambridge Road.

Councillor Alan Macro presented a petition on behalf of Theale residents which contained 403 signatures and which objected to Reading Borough Council's proposal to extend its boundary to include Theale. Theale had a clear physical separation from Reading and was a self contained village.

Councillor Matt Shakespeare presented a petition on behalf of residents living in Pangbourne, Tidmarsh and Sulham. The petition contained 582 signatures which supported these parishes remaining part of West Berkshire Council.

The Chairman thanked the Members for presenting their petitions which would be forwarded to the relevant officers for review and response.

Petition for debate: black bin collections

A petition for debate had been submitted for this meeting which made a request of Council to pause the changes and reconsider the three weekly black bin collection policy. It was eligible for debate as the number of signatories exceeded 1500.

Councillor Stuart Gourley gave thanks for the receipt of the petition and responded to the main points raised in the petition, as follows:

- It would be costly to pause the three weekly collection policy.

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- Councillor Gourley understood the concerns that had been raised, but highlighted that the majority of residents were managing well with this change. Support was however available to residents and 3% of households had applied for additional support.
- Larger bins had been made available for 585 households. Additional recycling containers had also been issued (approximately 27,000).
- The equality impact assessment was published with the budget papers in February 2025.
- The objectives for making this change were to improve the recycling rate and reduce black bin waste.
- Councillor Gourley explained that it was important to make these changes and not delay them. New legislation was due to be introduced by the Government in 2027/28 in relation to emissions from waste which could result in a significant tax bill, in the region of £1.4m per annum, if these changes were not introduced.
- This would provide greater value for money to tax payers and help to protect essential front line services.

Mr Richard Garvie, petition organiser, highlighted the following from the petition:

- He also wanted to see an increase in recycling. However, was concerned that support measures had not been put in place.
- Clear eligibility criteria needed to be published for receiving larger bins.
- Mr Garvie felt it was important to understand how many applications for support had been approved and how many applications had been rejected.
- There was concern that the consultation was only a box ticking exercise. This view was supported by comments in the petition. Mr Garvie felt that communication with residents on this matter had been poor.
- Residents' views needed to be heard and appropriate support put in place.

Councillor Shakespeare stated that financial pressures were being felt by local authorities across the country. Many other local authorities had already moved to three weekly black bin collections and more would follow. He was pleased that West Berkshire Council had taken this step for the reasons outlined. Residents could apply for a larger bin and criteria had been published.

Councillor Shakespeare proposed that Council should not take the action proposed within the petition and not pause the changes/reconsider the three weekly collection policy.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Justin Pemberton. Councillor Pemberton commented on the consultation that had taken place on this matter. The Liberal Democrat Administration had been engaging with residents since 2023. This included on the Waste Strategy which was published in 2024 after going through scrutiny.

Communication had taken place, this included advising residents of when changes would be introduced. Information was published on the website and residents could make contact if they needed support.

The decision to move to a three weekly collection took into account expert advice from officers, and sought to benefit residents.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon was concerned that questions raised in the petition remained unanswered. It was not clear how many residents who had requested support had been turned down.

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The move to three weekly collections had not been included in the Liberal Democrat Manifesto. Consultation had taken place but the responses to the consultation had not been taken into account when making the decision.

Councillor Mackinnon felt the changes should be paused.

Councillor Adrian Abbs noted that West Berkshire's recycling rate was lower than within South Oxfordshire (who operated two weekly collections). He acknowledged that South Oxfordshire operated different recycling arrangements, but he queried why efforts were not made to improve recycling in West Berkshire prior to moving to three weekly collections. If this was due to financial constraints then he felt this should be made clear to residents.

Councillor Jeff Brooks explained that since the Liberal Democrat Group produced its Manifesto, Central Government had indicated that they would be introducing a tax on emissions from waste.

He made clear that proposals were consulted upon and residents were listened to. As an example, 12 proposals were consulted upon as part of the 2024/25 budget consultation. Three were cancelled post consultation and a further seven were amended post consultation.

Similarly for the 2025/26 budget consultation, three proposals were cancelled post consultation and three amended post consultation (from a total of nine proposals).

It was recognised that there was some uncertainty among residents for the proposal to move to the three weekly bin collections. However, it was necessary to move forward with difficult measures when the Council was facing financial pressures. There was also the need to improve the recycling rate.

Councillor Brooks concluded by stating that he had offered to meet with Mr Garvie to discuss his concerns.

Councillor David Marsh felt that the case had not been made for this proposal, with many residents unhappy about it. There was significant concern with regard to the consultation process, with the perception that responses to the consultation had not been listened to. These concerns needed to be addressed.

Councillor Jo Stewart described some of the contact she had received from her residents on this issue. One resident had requested a larger bin but this had been refused and they had been directed to make a complaint. Extra waste was created by larger households. There was also concern about disposal of increased waste over Christmas, with residents having to transport waste to household waste centres. It was also difficult for some residents to put their bin alongside the highway with access in/out of properties a difficulty for some.

Councillor Stewart felt that time should be taken to iron out these issues.

Councillor Shakespeare, as proposer of the Motion, made reference to the assisted collection scheme which could assist with one of the issues raised by Councillor Stewart. He added that support was available and potential ways to improve this subject to ongoing review. The experience of other local authorities who operated similar support schemes was being looked at and lessons could be learned.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Matt Shakespeare and seconded by Councillor Justin Pemberton:

That the Council:

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“should not take the action proposed within the petition and not pause the changes/reconsider the three weekly collection policy.”

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

5. **Public Questions**

There were no public questions received.

6. **Membership of Committees**

There were no proposed changes to the membership of Committees.

7. **Motions from Previous Meetings**

There were no motions from previous meetings needing updates.

8. **Updates from Committees**

Council noted the meetings that had been held since the last ordinary meeting of Council as laid out in Agenda Item 9.

9. **Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plan (C4742)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 10) concerning whether the Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) should progress to referendum.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Denise Gaines and seconded by Councillor Justin Pemberton:

That the Council:

“Endorses the Decision Statement on the Hungerford NDP which concludes that the Hungerford NDP, with the inclusion of modifications, meets the Basic Conditions.

Because the modified Plan meets the Basic Conditions, it is recommended that:

- (a) The Plan should proceed to referendum;
- (b) Upon a successful ‘yes’ vote at referendum, agreement is sought that the Hungerford NDP is adopted immediately after the votes have been counted so that it becomes part of the Development Plan for West Berkshire; and
- (c) The authority to make minor alterations and corrections to the Hungerford NDP as set out within the Decision Statement (see Appendix D), prior to its proceeding to referendum, be delegated to the Executive Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing.”

Councillor Gaines explained that the NDP had been subject to independent examination and the Examiner had recommended that the NDP, with modifications, could proceed to referendum. However, it was for Council to decide if the NDP progressed to referendum. The report provided evidence for the Council to make that decision.

Councillor Gaines outlined the recommendations. She explained that a lengthy process had been undertaken to bring the NDP to this point. This included numerous consultations and resident participation. The purpose of the NDP was to guide development in the area. If successful at referendum, the NDP would be adopted as part of West Berkshire Council’s Local Plan.

Councillor Adrian Abbs voiced his support for the proposal. He emphasised the importance of maximising Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions to help communities undertake good work in their areas.

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Councillor Howard Woollaston explained that he had carefully reviewed the NDP as he had lived near to Hungerford for many years. He congratulated the Steering Group on its work, recognising that much time and effort had gone into producing the NDP.

Councillor Clive Taylor advised that the Tilehurst NDP had been in place for ten years and was aware of the extensive amount of work that needed to be put into the production of an NDP. He commended the Hungerford NDP.

Councillor Tony Vickers, another of the Ward Members for Hungerford, clarified that he had no personal involvement in the production of the NDP. He commended the Town Council and the Steering Group for all their hard work in producing this splendid document.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon provided comment on behalf of Councillor Dennis Benneyworth's (another of the Hungerford Ward Members). Councillor Benneyworth had received correspondence from residents both in support of the NDP and objecting to it. It was therefore appropriate for residents to vote at the referendum.

Councillor Pemberton noted his huge respect to the Hungerford NDP Steering Group for all their work. It was something to be proud of. He hoped that residents would give their support to the NDP. He added that the existence of the NDP would help with achieving CIL monies that could be invested in the community.

Councillor Gaines added her thanks to Hungerford Town Council and the Steering Group for doing such an excellent job.

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

10. **Youth Justice Plan 2025/26 (C4666)**

The Council considered a report (Agenda Item 11) which provided Council with oversight of the annual Youth Justice Plan for 2025/26 which was submitted to the Youth Justice Board.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Heather Codling and seconded by Councillor Nigel Foot:

That the Council:

“agree and formally endorse the Youth Justice Plan 2025/2026. The Youth Justice Support Team is a statutory service with contributions from partners including Police, Probation and Health, as such the plan has been formed in conjunction with those partners and been through a consultation process with the Youth Justice Management Group and the Building Communities Together Partnership where those partners are present.”

Councillor Codling stated that the Council was very privileged to have a Youth Justice service that was recognised as Outstanding, and had been so for many years.

As explained the Plan was prepared with partner organisations, but it also incorporated views from young people.

Key aims of the Plan included:

- Prevention in offending and a reduction in re-offending.
- A commitment to transforming the lives of children and young people who had gone through difficult and traumatic times.
- Helping children and young people to live a life free of crime and full of possibilities, helping them to achieve their full potential.

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The Plan had been endorsed by the Youth Justice Management Group and the Building Communities Together Partnership.

Councillor Dominic Boeck added his praise for the report and the work of the Youth Justice service. He noted that many of the excellent interventions were supported by grant funding and Councillor Boeck was concerned that this funding was due to come to an end. He queried what action was being undertaken to ensure this funding was maintained.

Councillor Foot agreed this document was something to be proud of. He praised all those involved for their work and for the achievement of an Outstanding service. He was pleased to note that the main points recorded in the Plan from children and young people were aligned with those raised by volunteers. Councillor Foot felt this highlighted the good connection between the children and young people, and the volunteers.

Councillor Codling explained that the grant funding referred to was renewed annually by the Youth Justice Board. She would work hard to ensure that the funding remained for West Berkshire.

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

11. Notices of Motion

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 12 – Motion A) submitted in the name of Councillor Adrian Abbs relating to the Experimental Traffic Order for Newbury Town Centre.

The Chairman informed Council that should the Motion be proposed and seconded, then it would be referred to the Executive for consideration, in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.6.1, as the detail of the Motion fell within the remit of the Executive.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Adrian Abbs and seconded by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

That the Council:

“Modify the Experimental Traffic Order for Newbury Town Centre which allowed for the trial of an alternative traffic flow model for Newbury Northbrook Street, Park Way and Wharf Road.

This Council notes the ongoing experimental traffic order restricting vehicle access to Newbury High Street from 10:00am to 11:00pm. While intended to foster pedestrian safety, economic support of business and environmental benefits, the current closure may inadvertently limit accessibility for key demographics and constrain local trade, particularly during evening hours.

This motion proposes an alternative trial scheme that:

1. **Permits One-Way Vehicular Flow:**

Allow traffic to enter Newbury Bartholomew St in a single south-to-north direction via Northbrook Street, with return access facilitated through Park Way. This flow maintains a controlled environment while improving connectivity and reducing congestion on feeder roads.

2. **Alternative of traffic return via A339**

If for some reason it is not possible to use Park Way and Wharf Road as the north to south route then the A339 can be designated as the route from north to south in the town.

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3. **Introduces Short-Stay Parking Incentives:**

Establish free short-stay parking bays—limited to 15-30 minutes—along designated sections of the Bartholomew Street and Northbrook Street. These locations would be monitored via time-discs or possibly digital enforcement mechanisms to ensure turnover.

Rationale and Community Benefit:

- **Economic Revitalisation:**

Offering limited-time free parking encourages brief shopping visits and supports “in-and-out” transactions critical to retailers.

- **Cultural and Nightlife Engagement:**

Enhanced evening access and short-stay flexibility promote casual dining, entertainment, and spontaneous engagement with nightlife—key to nurturing a vibrant town centre.

- **Inclusion and Accessibility:**

Facilitates visits by older residents, families with young children, and individuals with limited mobility, who may be disadvantaged under the current arrangement.

- **Better correlation with Time of Year**

As winter comes pedestrian traffic is likely to fall and easier access to shops, restaurants and event locations gains greater value.

- **Environmental Monitoring:**

The trial should run concurrently with environmental and traffic flow assessments to ensure impacts remain within sustainable thresholds.

This Council urges officers to explore feasibility, consult stakeholders including residents and local businesses, and prepare a report outlining implementation logistics, costs, and KPIs for review within three months.”

Councillor Abbs spoke to the Motion and explained that he was pleased that pedestrianisation had been introduced for the hours outlined. This was something he had campaigned for whilst part of the Liberal Democrat Group.

However, he felt it was timely to review its implementation and progress, alongside the Newbury BID. In particular, there was a need to consider the safety concerns highlighted for pedestrians that he had become aware of from local businesses and retailers, he had also conducted a local survey. This produced a minimal level of positive response and highlighted some negative aspects.

Councillor Stuart Gourley, responding as Portfolio Holder, gave thanks for the Motion. He highlighted that the trial period was still ongoing and the consultation was nearing its conclusion. Residents and businesses had been encouraged to respond to the consultation. The views/data collected from the consultation would be considered in full as part of determining the future approach.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 12 – Motion B) submitted in the name of Councillor Justin Pemberton to make clear the Council's commitment to the communities in the east of the district and seek to protect them from being moved to the neighbouring Reading Borough Council.

The Chairman informed Council that should the Motion be proposed and seconded, then it would be debated in order to facilitate the discharge of business in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.6.3.

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MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Justin Pemberton and seconded by Councillor Matt Shakespeare:

That the Council:

“Makes a clear commitment to communities in the east of the district and seek to protect them from being moved to the neighbouring Reading Borough Council.

Council notes that the wards of Pangbourne, Theale, Tilehurst and Purley, Tilehurst Birch Copse and Tilehurst South and Holybrook have historically always been part of West Berkshire or its predecessor Authorities. Council Members believe that West Berkshire Council must make clear its commitment to the communities of the above-mentioned wards and seek to protect them from being moved to neighbouring authorities, as Reading Borough Council is currently seeking to do.

Council notes that the affected wards contain individual communities and villages with unique characteristics. Several are self-sufficient in that they contain shopping centres, hospitality services, leisure facilities and centres of employment. Council notes that the areas affected by Reading Borough Council’s proposal have never been part of Reading Borough Council, and that our eastern communities have long been part of West Berkshire – with links which date back to 1894, when Council came together under Bradfield Rural District Council. Council does not believe that these areas will be served well by becoming part of a more metropolitan-focused local authority.

Council also recognises that many of the services provided to these residents by West Berkshire Council are of higher quality than those provided by Reading Borough Council to their residents, and that residents value this. But in any event, Council does not agree with Reading Borough Council’s proposal to absorb the above-mentioned wards and therefore reaffirms its commitment to these wards and to resist any such attempts – in the strongest possible terms.

Council therefore resolves to request that:

- The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Local Government Reorganisation write to the Leader and Chief Executive of Reading Borough Council to inform them that we strongly oppose Reading Borough Council’s proposal and to ask them not to press on with their proposal to incorporate any part of West Berkshire into Reading Borough as part of the reorganisation process.*
- The Leader and Portfolio Holder write to the MP for Reading West and Mid Berkshire informing her of the Council’s strong opposition to Reading’s proposal to extend their boundary to include any part of West Berkshire.*
- The Leader write to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Local Government and Homelessness (MHCLG) to seek assurance that the current geography of West Berkshire will remain intact in whatever new Unitary Authority area is decided upon at the end of the reorganisation process.”*

Councillor Pemberton spoke to the Motion. The Ridgeway proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would keep local government and local democracy effective and accountable. It would recognise and support local communities.

It was important under LGR to consider who was best placed to provide services to residents. Evidence showed this to be West Berkshire Council (WBC). The Council consistently outperformed its neighbours across comparable metrics. The Council’s Members and Officers worked very hard to serve the residents of West Berkshire.

Councillor Pemberton considered the proposal by Reading Borough Council (RBC), to incorporate eastern areas of West Berkshire into their boundary, to be rushed and ill-

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considered. There were a number of concerns which included a lack of clarity over how local services would be delivered, no recognition of parish councils in the east of the district (RBC had no parishes), as well as concerns for schools in the east of West Berkshire.

Residents living in the communities in the eastern area were proud to live in West Berkshire, regardless of whether they worked and went shopping in Reading. They were pleased that they were supported by a parish council.

Councillor Pemberton was concerned that eastern areas of the district would not receive the same level of local representation at RBC. RBC's proposals should be rejected.

Councillor Pemberton concluded by stating that he felt it was right for WBC to retain its boundaries and keep looking after its residents. This would still apply under the potential Ridgeway authority.

Councillor Richard Somner attended a recent meeting of Holybrook Parish Council where LGR proposals were discussed with much support for West Berkshire Council. He thanked West Berkshire's Councillors and officers for their attendance, as well as the Parish Councillors and local residents in attendance.

He felt that Lee Dillon MP could also be contacted to assist on this matter.

Councillor Somner stated that he was not convinced by RBC's proposal. He was concerned at RBC's lack of quality education results and delayed highways spend/action. He was supportive of the sound Ridgeway proposal.

Councillor Clive Taylor voiced concern at the suggestion in this Motion that communities in the east of the district needed to be protected from being moved to RBC. Many communities in the east were closely integrated with Reading.

All parties on RBC were supportive of their proposal.

Councillor Taylor felt there were reasons on which to be concerned for residents living in the east of West Berkshire. The existence of the Pincents Hill development in West Berkshire's Local Plan, delays to the rebuild of the Calcot schools, the financial pressures being felt by WBC. Further concerns included bin collections and access to pharmacies.

Councillor Taylor felt there was scope for both WBC's and RBC's proposals to happen to a degree. He was opposed to the Motion and the letters that were proposed to be written.

Councillor Adrian Abbs pointed out that while there might be some level of discontent felt by some residents, this did not necessarily mean they wanted to be away from WBC. It was important that residents were able to have their say on the proposals, with decisions informed by residents' views that were statistically significant.

Councillor Jo Stewart recently attended a meeting of Tilehurst Parish Council in order to hear residents' views. She had lived in Calcot for many years and, prior to becoming a Councillor, had queried why services were provided by WBC. However, since becoming a Councillor, she had been able to see how much better the service provision of WBC was in comparison to RBC.

Councillor Jeff Brooks had, together with his colleagues, visited many parishes in the east of the district with more to follow. The majority view was that people wanted to stay with WBC and were pleased with the services provided. This view should be made known to local MPs.

A high number of services provided by WBC were operating at a better level than in RBC and efforts would be made to continue to improve. One example was the Care Quality

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Commission (CQC) ratings. This was Requires Improvement for RBC, whereas WBC was rated as Good.

Councillor Alan Macro pointed out that RBC's Liberal Democrat Councillors were not supportive of Reading's proposal. He highlighted that residents living in his Ward (Theale) had their local needs met from the local area. They utilised WBC's services.

A Parish Poll would soon be conducted to give Theale residents the opportunity to vote on whether they would wish to remain part of West Berkshire.

Councillor Stuart Gourley compared waste collection rates between the two local authorities. Waste capacity at RBC on a two weekly collection frequency was lower than WBC's on a three weekly frequency.

Councillor Heather Codling highlighted Ofsted ratings. 80% of secondary schools in RBC were rated as Good or Outstanding. This was 92.3% in WBC.

89% of primary schools achieved this rated in RBC, with 93.6% achieving that in WBC.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon stated that the Conservative Group supported this Motion. He did however raise a concern that, at the present time, many residents were dissatisfied at the move to three weekly bin collections and did not feel they were being listened to.

Councillor Tony Vickers recalled the consultation undertaken as part of the last LGR when residents living in the east were clear they wanted to be part of WBC.

Councillor Shakespeare spoke of his Ward (Pangbourne). He praised the area and its supportive community. He wanted Pangbourne to remain a rural village and remain part of WBC.

He was concerned that RBC, initially, had conducted no consultation and imposed its proposal on its residents. When they did consult, it was limited.

Councillor Shakespeare was hopeful that the views of residents were recognised by Central Government.

Councillor Pemberton stated his concern at the approach taken by RBC. LGR should be a democratic process, but Reading had not considered the views of residents.

The statistics showed that residents living in the east of the district overwhelmingly wanted to stay living in WBC. West Berkshire's residents would continue to be listened to.

Councillor Pemberton explained that Lee Dillon MP was not listed in the Motion as the east of the district was not part of his constituency. However, he was aware that Mr Dillon was involved in much work behind the scenes with his colleagues in South Oxfordshire on the Ridgeway proposal.

The Motion was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 12 – Motion C) submitted in the name of Councillor Jeff Brooks relating to the installation of sprinklers or other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) in the Council's own building stock.

The Chairman informed Council that should the Motion be proposed and seconded, then it would be referred to the Executive for consideration, in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.6.1, as the detail of the Motion fell within the remit of the Executive.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Jeff Brooks and seconded by Councillor Billy Drummond:

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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

This Council:

Recognises that sprinklers and other Automatic Fire Suppression Systems (AFSS) 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.

Supports the National Fire Chiefs’ Council position on sprinklers and will write to Central Government to express support for the creation of a legal requirement to fit sprinklers or AFSS in buildings.

Commits to the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS within its own building stock when constructing new buildings, significant extensions and relevant refurbishment of existing buildings or as a retrofitted solution when undertaking major refurbishments of existing buildings where the extent of the refurbishment makes the fitting of sprinklers viable.

Promotes and supports the installation of sprinklers or other AFSS for all new or refurbished buildings and particularly those that present the most significant risk to the occupants, public and firefighters and will do this through planning application and building control processes.”

Councillor Brooks referred to the Council's existing fire suppression policy which was introduced in 2013. This required that all new buildings and extensions be subject to the policy, but only if they adhered to a constrictive set of criteria which limited installation of AFSS.

The purpose of this Motion was to strengthen the existing policy. This would include a commitment to install sprinklers or other AFSS in the Council's own building stock with, in the vast majority of cases, a presumption in favour of installation.

Most importantly, this was about saving lives. No deaths had occurred in the UK from fire in buildings fitted with sprinklers.

Sprinklers and AFSS also protected properties from damage. It was clarified that sprinklers/AFSS were only activated at an extremely high heat.

This move was being called for by Fire Chiefs nationally

Councillor Iain Cottingham, responding as Portfolio Holder, gave his full support to taking this matter through to the Executive for consideration.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 12 – Motion D) submitted in the name of Councillor Ross Mackinnon relating to decisions made that went contrary to the majority of residents’ opinions via a public consultation.

The Chairman informed Council that should the Motion be proposed and seconded, then it would be referred to the Executive for consideration, in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.6.1, as the detail of the Motion fell within the remit of the Executive.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Ross Mackinnon and seconded by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

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“That where a decision is made contrary to the majority of residents’ opinions via a public consultation, then an explanatory statement should be made explaining the reasons for doing so

- 1. This Council considers that individual members, the Executive, and the Council itself should always be honest and transparent with, and accountable to, the residents of West Berkshire.*
- 2. This Council notes with approval that the foreword to the Liberal Democrats’ manifesto for the 2023 West Berkshire Council elections included the following commitment:*

“A Liberal Democrat administration will be one that listens to you, and gives you a real say in the decisions that affect our area.”

- 3. This Council recognises that in the event that:*
 - i. residents are asked for their views on a particular proposal or policy via a public consultation, and*
 - ii. residents’ responses indicate a majority either for their approval or for their disapproval of that proposal or policy, and*
 - iii. following the consultation process the relevant decision-making body (Council, Executive or Individual Executive Member) makes a decision not in accordance with the majority of residents’ responses, then*

there is a risk that public trust in the Council, the public’s feeling that they are listened to, and the public’s feeling that they have a real say in the decisions that affect our area, will be diminished.

- 4. This Council therefore considers that in the event a decision is made contrary to the majority of residents’ opinions expressed via a public consultation, then a statement should be published on the Council’s public website no more than 14 days after the making of the decision, written by:*

the Chairman of Council in respect of a Council decision, or

the Leader of the Council in respect of an Executive decision, or

the relevant Individual Executive Member in respect of an Individual Executive Member decision,

clearly informing residents that a decision has been made contrary to the majority of residents’ opinions expressed via a public consultation, and explaining the decision-maker’s rationale for making that decision not in accordance with that majority of residents’ opinions.”

Councillor Mackinnon considered this to be a topical Motion and a useful one to raise following the debate on the black bin collection petition where the view of residents had not been taken into account.

The purpose of this Motion was to ensure that residents were treated with courtesy and respect, and informed in cases where decisions were made that went contrary to public opinion. In such cases, a statement should be issued by the Council that explained the reasoning for making the decision.

Councillor Jeff Brooks, responding as Portfolio Holder, commented that this sounded a reasonable suggestion. However, he made it clear that the Liberal Democrat Administration did not ignore residents or consultation responses. He was confident in stating that residents were listened to and treated with respect. This was supported by

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the comments made by Councillor Brooks as part of the petition debate. It was unfortunately the case however that it was not always possible to please all residents in some cases. It was sometimes necessary to make decisions that were for the greater good.

Councillor Brooks continued by explaining that, in the main, the actions proposed within the Motion were taking place. Documentation to support decision making was made public with consultation responses included. However, he acknowledged that this an area on which the Council could improve.

He added the view that while there could be well organised objection to a proposal, there could well be a large silent majority who were in favour of it.

Councillor Brooks concluded by advising that he was reviewing previous consultations to identify cases where decisions were made that went contrary to the feedback received from members of the public.

The Council considered the under-mentioned Motion (Agenda item 12 – Motion E) submitted in the name of Councillor David Marsh requesting a review of the Council's investments and those of the Berkshire Pension Fund.

The Chairman informed Council that should the Motion be proposed and seconded, then it would be debated in order to facilitate the discharge of business in accordance with Procedure Rule 12.6.3.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor David Marsh and seconded by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

That the Council:

“Resolves to review its own investments and request that those of the Berkshire Pension Fund are reviewed to identify any direct or indirect holdings in companies that are supplying arms, military technology, or logistical support which enable breaches of international law in Gaza.

West Berkshire Council recognises its responsibility to ensure that public money, including its own investments and those of the Berkshire Pension Fund, is used in a manner consistent with our values of peace, human rights, and respect for international law.

Council notes with grave concern the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the verdict of the United Nations commission of inquiry that a genocide of the Palestinian people, as defined by international law, is taking place (“killing members of a group, causing them serious bodily and mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions calculated to destroy the group, and preventing births”).

Council notes that a number of local authorities in the UK are supporting the divestment of pension funds from companies which are facilitating serious breaches of international law by, for example, supplying military technology to Israel or financing illegal settlements in the West Bank.

Council therefore resolves to:

Request that the Executive review its own investments and request that those of the Berkshire Pension Fund are reviewed to identify any direct or indirect holdings in companies that are supplying arms, military technology, or logistical support which enable breaches of international law in Gaza.

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Work with its asset managers to take steps to end such investments and strongly request, through its representative, that the Berkshire Pension Fund does the same.

Report back to Council within three months on progress made.”

Councillor Marsh stated the importance of ensuring that investments were ethical. He believed this was supported by the majority of residents.

Councillor Marsh outlined the many severe concerns from the conflict in Gaza which had resulted in a significant and tragic loss of life. He gave his view that the attack of Hamas on Israel in October 2023 did not justify the response from Israel.

There was concern at the potential arming of this conflict from investments and Councillor Marsh highlighted the need to ensure that the Council's investments and those of the Berkshire Pension Fund did not in any way go towards that. Many other local authorities had already sought to undertake this or a very similar action. Disinvestment should be ensured, which would be the right thing for the Council to do, albeit in a small way.

The Motion was opened up for debate and Members across the Chamber shared their sadness at the tragic loss of life and the impact on survivors, and many made comments in that regard.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that there were two sides to the conflict, which had commenced following the Hamas attack on Israel. Israel had the right to defend its borders. He supported the Pension Fund in holding investments in companies that was in accordance with the UK Government's legislation and advice.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam represented the Council on the Berkshire Pension Fund Committee and would raise this issue at the Committee's next meeting in December, but added that activity on this matter had already commenced.

Councillor Cottam supported the Motion, specifically disinvestment where there were breaches of international law.

Councillor Jeff Brooks felt it was right that Council was debating this issue, no matter how difficult a subject it was. He supported disinvestment where there were breaches of international law.

Councillor Richard Somner voiced the importance of not investing in any organisation that could be supporting any conflict that went contrary to international law. In such cases the Council should withdraw any investment and look to the Berkshire Pension Fund to do the same.

Councillor Tony Vickers felt it had been right for the debate to be held as it was a matter of high public interest. There needed to be a recognised framework for international law.

Councillor Culver stated that the Council should do all it possibly could to not invest its funds in the wrong way. This was a small action that could be taken by the Council. To date, 17 other local authorities had passed a similar Motion.

She added that a significant number of peace vigils had been held in Newbury.

Councillor Marsh acknowledged that while the Motion related to the conflict in Gaza, he recognised the points made about other conflicts across the world. The severity being felt in Gaza was however hugely significant and this was recognised by a number of international organisations.

Councillor Tony Vickers reclarified the recommendation in the Motion. He added that he would be abstaining from the vote.

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The Motion was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

12. **Members' Questions**

Continuation of meeting – in accordance with the Council's Constitution, Part 3, point 10.8, Council supported the motion that the remaining business could be concluded by 10.30pm, and therefore proceeded with the remainder of the meeting.

Details of the Member question and answer session is available from the following link: [Q&As](#).

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 10.15pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature