DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

THURSDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Jeff Brooks (Chairman), Patrick Clark, Heather Codling (Vice-Chairman), Iain Cottingham, Nigel Foot, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Tom McCann and Justin Pemberton

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, David Marsh, and Adrian Abbs

Officers Present: Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Sam Chiverton (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Director – Finance, Property & Procurement), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic) and Rebecca Wilshire (Service Director Children's Services)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Vicky Poole and Tony Vickers

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

Councillor Jeff Brooks announced the introduction of a Members Dashboard which detailed all highways and countryside fault reporting to allow Members to review all reported issues within their wards.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Public Questions

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that the wording of a number of questions received was not courteous, and noted that in future questions would be rejected if they were insulting or lacked courtesy.

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. 2025/26 Q2 Financial Performance Report (EX4674)

Councillors Iain Cottingham, Heather Codling and Patrick Clark all made statements relating to the Council's finances and increasing pressures from Children's Services and Adult Social Care. The statements can be viewed in full here.

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced the report (Agenda Item 6), which detailed the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Quarter Two 2025/26 outturn.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon requested clarification from Councillor Codling in relation to the Children's Services figures discussed. Councillor Codling repeated that the Children's Services budget for 2022/23 had been £11 million, which had increased to £19.8 million for 2025/26 but was forecast to be £23.4 million by Quarter Four.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that it was the biggest jump in an overspend outturn in one quarter that he could remember and described it as financial chaos. Councillor Mackinnon noted that the Council had just spent £700,000 on a grass football pitch at Faraday Road which was now about to be replaced; was planning to sell its commercial property portfolio and thereby lose £1 million in revenue; had increased the number of Executive Members to ten; and referred to an outdated Transformation spend figure which had recently been presented for review at a Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting; all of which he suggested displayed a lack of control over the finances.

Councillor Mackinnon queried what modelling changes the Executive would be adopting to prevent a recurrence of such a large overspend. Councillor Jeff Brooks responded that he did not accept the accusation of 'chaos' nor the comments relating to the Transformation programme. Councillor Brooks further provided assurances that the correct controls were in place going forward.

Councillor Cottingham reminded Councillor Mackinnon that in Quarter One of 2022/23 there had been an £8.1 million overspend under the previous administration. He commented that the Council was not in isolation and that local authorities across the country were struggling with the increased Adult Social Care pressures and the high unit cost of residential care for children. Councillor Cottingham noted that the budget had forecast one additional child but had needed to extend to four children in care.

Councillor Cottingham further referred to an £800,000 saving that the Council had hoped to make, which had not occurred due to the collapse of NRS.

Councillor Cottingham confirmed that there were numerous controls in place particularly in driving down the commissioning costs for care placements.

Councillor Mackinnon queried how Councillor Brooks could reject the comment in relation to Transformation when he had been present at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee meeting and been unable to justify that the saving detailed within the report would be achieved. Councillor Brooks responded that Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee would review all business cases for transformation going forward. He further commented that the £469,000 detailed in the paperwork had returned as a pressure as the Executive had decided not to proceed with the project.

Councillor Mackinnon queried whether there had been a lack of political focus to the finances. Councillor Brooks rejected the suggestion.

Councillor David Marsh referred to the Adult Resource Centres and the inability to provide sufficient alternative private care and queried whether Councillor Clark still intended to sell off one or more of its care homes. Councillor Clark responded that part of the reason for not pursuing sale of the Adult Resource Centres was not due to finding alternative providers but had been due to being unable to provide a similar level of care. Councillor Brooks added that the Council was currently engaging to consider whether private providers could take over the care homes, and consequently there needed to be discretion when discussing.

Councillor Marsh queried when the Council was likely to announce a deal in relation to Newbury Gateway and the Bond Riverside regeneration project. Councillor Brooks responded that again there was a market engagement exercise currently being undertaken and so was unable to provide any further update at this time but would provide updates when applicable.

Councillor Dominic Boeck suggested that the Children's Services budget was not spent wholly on statutory requirements and queried how services such as Early Help would be protected. Councillor Codling responded that that particular area would become statutory from April 2026 and so would continue to be funded with appropriate budgeting.

Councillor Brooks suggested that the question related more to the distinction between statutory and non-statutory services and how non-statutory services would be protected. He commented that an independent person would be appointed to provide challenge to commissioning care packages.

Councillor Nigel Foot further added that the Health and Wellbeing Board would be focusing specifically on early years intervention.

RESOLVED that: Executive note

- The forecast Q2 revenue outturn is £6.8m/ 3.7% adverse (Q2 vs Budget). Total net revenue is forecast at £190.2m in the Q2 outturn, vs £183.4m in the Budget.
- The Q2 reprofiling of £22.5m of capital budget, approved by the S151 officer in consultation with the portfolio holder for Finance.
- The revised position at Q2 for expected capital expenditure in 2025/26 is £58.3m against an updated budget of £81.7m. £22.5m has been approved to slip to 2026/27 leaving a variance of £0.9m potentially unspent.

6. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report October 2025 (EX4745)

Councillor Heather Codling introduced the report (Agenda Item 7), which provided an overview of Ofsted's findings following an Ofsted visit to West Berkshire's Children's Services to conduct a short ILACS (Inspections of Local Authority Children's Services) between 8 – 19 September 2025.

Councillor Codling thanked all staff involved in the inspection and noted that the commentary from the inspectors during the visit had been very positive.

Councillor Jeff Brooks echoed thanks to Rebecca Wilshire, Service Director Children's Social Care, and the team.

Councillor Dominic Boeck congratulated officers and Members for the 'Good' rating and noted that it was a continuation of the previous administration's achievements.

Councillor Boeck referred to the report and its assertion that there had been a 'deterioration in some services' in the period between the last two inspections and queried the evidence for this. Councillor Codling agreed to discuss the matter privately with Councillor Boeck but also suggested that the comment related to case numbers and a lack of specific oversight and a gap in management when the current administration had taken control of the Council.

Councillor Boeck suggested that the current administration was not presenting the situation accurately. Councillor Codling commented that the inspectors had referred to a number of case notes and spoken to a number of staff within the service and had based their findings on those reviews.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon agreed that it was an inspection to be proud of but commented that the press release and official Council communications relating to the report findings had been unacceptable and amounted to a political attack on the previous administration.

Councillor Brooks commented that he would review communications in terms of statements made, however reiterated that he believed that risks had been previously taken in the management of the service.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that there had been staffing challenges and recruitment challenges but suggested that those were not reflective of a lack of political focus, they were reflective of challenges within the service.

RESOLVED that:

- To inform the Executive of the "Good" overall effectiveness rating and commend the progress made since 2023.
- To inform the Executive that for the continued development of children's services that Executive note the requirement for:
  - Investment in Early Help capacity to ensure timely support for families.
  - Propose a revised multi-agency Early Help strategy with clear delivery milestones.
  - Targeted improvement in practice for children experiencing chronic neglect and domestic abuse.
  - Standardising contingency plans across child protection and child-in-need cases.
  - Continued recruitment and retention efforts.
  - Twice yearly progress reports to the committee on Ofsted development progress concentrating on Early Help capacity, participation metrics and Workforce stability & caseloads.

.

7. Rights of Way Improvement Plan (EX4700)

Councillor Nigel Foot introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which requested adoption of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Councillor Richard Somner noted that it was a very comprehensive report and thanked officers for their work. Councillor Somner reminded the public of Linear Park within his own ward but noted the difficulty with the use of motorised vehicles in the area. Councillor Somner suggested that further work could be undertaken with signposting at Linear Park to clearly delineate which gates offered disabled access and which did not.

Councillor Somner highlighted a small number of typographical errors within the report and suggested further proofreading before final publication.

Councillor David Marsh commented that it was an excellent report and queried whether there was sufficient resource within the department to deliver the report's aspirations. Councillor Foot responded that there were resources allocated to the Improvement Plan.

In response to a query as to whether the team would be able to 'Incorporate legal changes into a new Consolidated Definitive map and Statement by 2030', Councillor Foot confirmed that officers would do their best to action this, but noted that the legal aspect to Public Rights of Way quite often slowed the process down, particularly when there were objections.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commended the report and queried how wards would be prioritised in relation to the rollout of the Plan. Councillor Foot referred to the work of volunteers throughout the district that contributed to the maintenance of public rights of way. He also referred to wellbeing walks which were hosted by volunteers and

encouraged those with mobility issues to walk throughout the district. Councillor Foot further commented that work would be prioritised on the basis of those footpaths requiring work.

Councillor Boeck queried whether the introduction of five new routes a year would be co-produced with disabled and younger users. Councillor Foot confirmed that this would be the case and would be undertaken via the Local Access Forum.

Councillor Stuart Gourley seconded the recommendation within the report and noted how many kilometres of public rights of way there were in the district, which was only slightly less than the number of highways. Councillor Gourley also commended the work undertaken with landowners noting the recent successful access improvement works to Speen Moors.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- To approve the adoption and publication of the ROWIP. The ROWIP has been compiled using the results of extensive public consultation and gathering of evidence.
- To agree that the Countryside service will produce, annually, actionable targets within the ROWIP Delivery Plan. The ROWIP Delivery Plan will set out SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) targets for management activities in the years ahead, and that this Delivery Plan will be agreed with the relevant Portfolio Holder on an annual basis.

8. Local Planning Enforcement Plan 2025 (EX4735)

Councillor Denise Gaines introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), which sought approval from Executive to carry out public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan.

Councillor Richard Somner expressed his support for consultation on the Plan and noted that it was a non-statutory element of service provided by the Council which received a lot of focus. He queried whether there would be sufficient resource to deliver what was laid out within the Plan. Councillor Gaines confirmed that there would be sufficient resource.

Councillor Patrick Clark seconded the recommendation within the report, noting the importance of consulting and the aim to make the planning process easier to understand.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- **To approve public consultation on the Draft West Berkshire Council Local Enforcement Plan 2025.**

9. Public Protection Partnership Shared Service Agreement (C4536)

Councillor Tom McCann introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 10), which sought authorisation for West Berkshire Council to enter into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31 March 2029, and for Wokingham Borough Council to become a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon noted that he remembered Wokingham Borough Council exiting a previous agreement and the ensuring financial implications, and queried what protection was in place to prevent a repetition. Councillor McCann commented that the agreement included an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice.

Councillor David Marsh queried whether the agreement would cease if the Ridgeway Council proposal was approved. Councillor Jeff Brooks suggested that to the contrary it could provide the opportunity for further joint arrangements and additional work.

Councillor Justin Pemberton seconded the recommendations within the report, and celebrated the proposal and the successful work of the shared service.

RESOLVED that:

- West Berkshire Council enters into a new three authority shared service agreement with Bracknell Forest Council and Wokingham Borough Council until the 31 March 2029.
- That the Executive delegates its public protection related functions to the Joint Public Protection Committee until the 31 March 2029.
- That the agreement includes an exit clause based on a minimum of twelve months' notice to give effect to leaving the agreement on the 31 March in any given year.
- West Berkshire Council continues to be the host authority.
- That the Service Lead for Public Protection in conjunction with the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to enter into this agreement.
- Wokingham Borough Council becomes a full Member of the Joint Public Protection Committee and all other governance arrangements and that the terms be based on those set out in the original shared service agreement of the 6 January 2017.
- That the Executive recommends to full Council that the Terms of Reference and relevant sections of the Constitution (Part 3.1 Appendix JPPC and Part 6.5 Council Bodies Rules) be amended to reflect the revised Governance arrangements set out in recommendation 2.6 above.

10. 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 6.00 pm and closed at 8.35 pm)

CHAIRMAN …….

Date of Signature …….