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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON

WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2025

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

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, David Marsh, and Tony Vickers

Officers Present: Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Sam Chiverton (Democratic Services Officer), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Tom McCann, Vicky Poole, and Adrian Abbs

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025 - 2030 (EX4733)

Councillor Denise Gaines introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 3), which sought approval for adoption of the new North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan 2025-30 for the National Landscape legally referred to as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Councillor Tony Vickers, Vice Chairman of North Wessex Downs AONB Council of Partners Board, thanked the Leader for allowing him to speak and praised the work of the eleven-person North Wessex Downs National Landscape team. He also highlighted the strong volunteer resource that were vital to the work of the team.

Councillor Vickers suggested it was not a realistic option not to adopt the Management Plan, as there was a legal duty to seek to conserve and enhance the North Wessex Downs.

Councillor Vickers referred to the Protected Landscape Targets and to Target 7 which aimed to restore peat and heathland, and noted that whilst work would be undertaken the specific target had not been referenced within the Management Plan due to the very small size of relevant land within the North Wessex Downs.

Councillor Vickers noted that he had made a pledge that morning on behalf of West Berkshire Council to work collaboratively in the partnership with other decision makers on the Board.

Councillor Vickers noted that if the Management Plan was approved, the North Wessex Downs would become the first area in the United Kingdom to achieve IUCN green list status.

Members collectively supported approval of the Management Plan and Councillor Heather Codling thanked Councillor Vickers for all the work undertaken in his role on the Council of Partners Board.

Councillor Nigel Foot seconded the recommendation within the report and reminded Members of the previous week's decision to approve the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, noting that it was now possible to quantify in monetary terms the benefit of green spaces. Councillor Foot commented that there was a £27.1 million per annum benefit to the residents and visitors of West Berkshire which equated to 8.5 million visits per annum. Councillor Foot noted how important this was, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing benefits.

Councillor Foot further praised and thanked the work of Councillor Vickers, all volunteers and the Public Rights of Way and Countryside officers.

Councillor Gaines expressed disappointment that Councillor Vickers did not feel that the Council already worked collaboratively with partners but thanked him for all his work on the Council of Partners and praised the Management Plan as an excellent document.

RESOLVED that: Executive approve the adoption of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan.

3. Local Government Reorganisation - Full Proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (EX4717)

Councillor Justin Pemberton introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 4), which proposed the approval of the Local Government Reorganisation Full Proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire for submission to Government. It was noted that the report had previously been reviewed and discussed by Council and Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Pemberton clarified that the report was proposed with the amendment set out at recommendation (f). It was noted that the recommendation had been included to take account of comments made by Green Party Members to include an ambition statement 'to deliver strong action on climate change and promote nature recovery'; and also to acknowledge that there were some amendments required to existing legal structures in relation to the Fire Authority in Oxfordshire.

Councillor Pemberton commented that the pack presented a formal proposal for a two unitary authority submission; to the south, a proposal for West Berkshire Council to merge with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils to form the new Ridgeway Council; and to the north a proposal to merge Oxford City Council with West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils to form an Oxford and Shires Council.

It was acknowledged that there were financial implications to the Proposal, the costs and benefits of which were set out within the report. Councillor Pemberton noted that two sets of savings related to the initial transition savings and transformation savings arising from potential transformation programmes.

It was noted that the final Proposal was a result of extensive engagement with residents, businesses and affected stakeholders.

Councillor Pemberton clarified that following Executive decision, the Government was expected to decide on the proposal in the summer of 2026, following which it was anticipated that elections would take place in May 2027.

Councillor David Marsh queried what would happen to West Berkshire Council Members in May 2027 if the Proposal was approved. He further suggested that ward sizes were likely to be much larger and queried how quickly the Boundary Commission would review

this. He further queried whether Unison would be involved in the ongoing Ridgeway process.

Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that there was a need in transition for services to be provided until the new authority was able to take over and suggested that West Berkshire Council was likely to continue until 2028, whilst the shadow authority was setting up its staffing, budget and structure, for its first year in existence of 2028/29.

Councillor Brooks commented that ward sizes varied across the country and that a Boundary Commission review was likely to take place in the first electoral period of Ridgeway Council.

Councillor Pemberton noted that the Proposal had been completed within the timescales and criteria set by Government and had worked on the basis that across Ridgeway there would be 96 councillors, 38 of which would be based in West Berkshire. This had relied on a basic approach of reducing three Member wards to two, which would increase the number of residents within a ward but was not felt to be contrary to other areas in the country.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon offered his full support for the Proposal.

Councillor Brooks noted that he had met with Unison that day and provided assurances that they would be consulted in relation to any change and progress going forward with the Proposal.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations with the report and noted that it provided a real opportunity for residents and staff of West Berkshire.

RESOLVED that: Executive

a) Is informed that since the statutory invitation to all councils in two tier areas, significant work has been undertaken by all Oxfordshire Councils and West Berkshire Council.
b) Is informed that there has been significant engagement and collaboration on the development of these proposals by Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, West Berkshire Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council.
c) Is informed that two other proposals will be submitted, one proposed by Oxfordshire County Council covering the Oxfordshire area (but excluding West Berkshire) and one from Oxford City Council covering the Oxfordshire and West Berkshire area.
d) Approves the submission to Government of a full proposal as detailed at Appendix A, for a two unitary model based on one new unitary council covering the entire existing boundaries of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and West Berkshire Council, with the working title of ‘Ridgeway’, and a second new unitary covering the entire existing boundaries of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire District Councils and Oxford City Council, with a working title of ‘Oxford & Shires’.
e) Subject to recommendation d) being approved, notes that Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Councill will submit the full proposal directly to Government in line with the Oxfordshire invitation letter.
f) Delegates to the Executive Director for Resources the authority, with the agreement of the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, to make changes to the proposal document in Appendix A prior to the submission to Government.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.00 pm)

EXECUTIVE - 12 NOVEMBER 2025 - MINUTES

CHAIRMAN ……

Date of Signature ……