

DRAFT

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

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER 2025**

Councillors Present: Erik Pattenden (Chairman), Howard Woollaston (Vice-Chairman), Dominic Boeck, Jeremy Cottam, Laura Coyle, Carolyn Culver, Billy Drummond, Stephanie Steevenson, Simon Carey and David Southgate

Also Present: Sarah Clarke, Julie Gilhespy, Thomas Radbourne

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Owen Jeffery and Shannon Coleman-Slaughter

PART I

1 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2025 would be redrafted and presented to the next meeting with the following amendments:

- Councillor Carolyn Culver's questions in Item four of the minutes to be captured regarding personnel issues such as sickness, fire and rehire, and exit interviews
- Councillor Culver's questions regarding any cost benefits analysis of centralisation of staff would be included.
- Councillor Culver's questions in Item seven and Councillor Iain Cottingham's explanation of Exceptional Financial Support, and the points raised regarding the borrowing headroom would be included.
- Councillor Culver's question and the response received regarding the Going Concern document would be included in the minutes.
- Councillor Culver's question and the response received regarding the benefits of a potential merger with Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Council would be included in the minutes.
- Councillor Culver's question and the officer's response received in item seven in the minutes on transformation would be included in the minutes.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 Forward Plan

The Committee considered the Governance Committee Forward Plan (Agenda Item 4).

Members noted that the Constitution Review Task Group was not included on the Forward Plan.

Officers stated that the Constitution Review Task Group continued to meet, and there were some changes to the Constitution. Any changes to the constitution must go to the Governance Committee before going to Council.

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Officers indicated that if the Committee had any concerns regarding Constitution updates that they felt should be prioritised, then Members could contact the Chair of the Constitution Review Task Group.

Officers noted that the program of the Constitution Review Task Group had previously been brought to the Governance Committee as part of the Forward Plan.

Action: The Constitution Review Task Group to be included on the Forward Plan. A report on Constitutional Updates was due to go to Corporate Board, and it may be at the next meeting of Governance in November 2025.

Action: Constitution updates to be included on the Forward Plan as a twice-yearly standing item.

Action: The Constitution Review Task Group work schedule to be included in the next Governance Committee.

Action: The Governance Committee proposed that the Constitution Review Task Group consider making the Constitution one searchable PDF document, rather than separate webpages.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

4 Internal Audit Update Report Quarter 1 2025-26

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 5) concerning Internal Audit Update Report Quarter 1 2025-26.

Members had a number of questions, and Julie Gilhespey responded as follow:

- There were underlying issues affecting the homelessness process
- There had been issues and delays with the new housing system generating invoices for rent. It was not working with Agresso, and the financial data was not mirroring across both systems. This was a known issue by the time of the audit and was still a work in progress.
- All software needed to interface with Agresso. Software to enable interfacing can be written internally, as systems from different suppliers may not interface initially. West Berkshire was not unique in having issues with interfacing.
- The rent backlog had no impact on vulnerable clients. The impact was on internal financial records and how they were recording the information and there was no impact on clients.
- There was a period where no invoices were generated automatically, however clients were aware of their rent obligations, as that was a separate process.
- There was a delay in some invoices being issued. This affected people if they did not wish to make or had not made any payments. The Council did not request some of the income promptly.
- The rent backlog was a known issue, and it had taken time to find alternative options, and take remedial action. By the time of the audit, the invoices and remedial action were almost up to date. However, the rental system on the housing system was not live. Issues identified by the audit will be followed up after six months, as is normal practice.
- Some of the recommendations from the audit focussed on improving and updating debt management processes and debt recovery. Part of that would include how they liaise with tenants and clients as part of that process.

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- When purchasing a new ICT system, unless it has been tested with the internal systems the Council was reliant on the supplier and the quoters for the contract regarding system compatibility.
- It was unlikely that an IT issue would not occur again, as no supplier could guarantee 100% that their product would work with all of the software at the Council.
- Offline testing had showed that there was an issue with invoicing. A number of options were considered to rectify the issue, and while a solution was being sought, the Council fell back to using the previous process.

ACTION: Project management task and finish group to be informed about the project and the issues as there could be important constructive feedback and learning.

- The Council had been in contact with the supplier and had received an upgraded version that was being tested. It should be live soon.
- The Volker Highways contract was due for renewal next year. The audit recommendations were to give advice or consideration of things for the new contract and what should be included.
- The different audit stages were described in detail.
- The dedicated home to school transport was looked at separately as it was a large project. The compliance of the project had been investigated previously, and the cost effectiveness of the project had been reviewed by external consultants. The audit team were focussed on ensuring adequate controls to ensure the project was complying with legislation, internal policies and procedures, and ensuring the controls and processes were effective. The audit team could investigate value for money, but this was a different technique and audit approach.
- Section 17 referred to legislation covering Children's Social Care and covered bringing children into care or needing to accommodate children. Section 17 was additional support that the Council could provide and was to a certain degree at its discretion.
- The three conversations model was referred to the approach taken by Adult Social Care with clients when they came through the front door. It sought to identify if there were other appropriate sources of support for clients instead of immediately provided long-term care. It was a national good practice model.

RESOLVED that the committee note the Internal Audit Update Report Quarter 1 2025-26

5 Strategic Risk Register Q4 2024/25

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 6) concerning Strategic Risk Register Q4 2024/25.

Members asked a number of questions, and received the following responses:

- In Part II of the meeting, additional detail would be included that would show the different risks on the matrix.
- The Part I agenda was available to the public and included access to the heat map. They were able to see a description and the details of the nature of the risk such as financial loss or compliance.
- The analysis of risk management was an iterative process, some of the risks were ongoing, and some were risks that had to be mitigated as far as possible.

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- The report mentions 16 risks, five extreme and 13 high. This was an error, it should have stated 11 high risks, and the mistake would be rectified.

Action: That the error in 4.8 stating that there were 13 high risks would be amended to state 11 high risks.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Strategic Risk Register Q4 2024/25.

6 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, 5, and 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the [Local Government \(Access to Information\)\(Variation\) Order 2006](#). [Section 10, Part 10 of the Constitution also refers.](#)

7 Strategic Risk Register Q4 2024/25

(Paragraph 3, 5, and 6)

The Committee considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 8) concerning Strategic Risk Register Q4 2024/25.

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

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature