

DRAFT

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

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2026

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

Also Present: Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Howard Woollaston, Clive Hooker, David Marsh, Adrian Abbs, Phil Barnett and Billy Drummond

Officers Present: Melanie Booth (Group Executive), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), Shannon Coleman-Slaughter (Service Lead – Financial, Reporting and Property), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), April Peberdy (Service Director – Community Services), Thomas Radbourne (Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Stuart Gourley

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 18 December 2025, and 29 January 2026 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. Public Questions

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

4. Petitions

Councillor Phil Barnett presented a petition on behalf of a resident containing 70 signatures which requested the creation of Community Nature Reserve in Newtown Road, Newbury. The petition was referred to officers for review.

5. Medium- Term Financial Strategy: Financial Years 2026-2030 (C4678)

Councillor Jeff Brooks stated that as Agenda Items 6 -10 had already been debated at Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee and would be further debated at Council on 26 February, the Executive would not debate the reports at the meeting but would accept questions of clarification.

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 6), which set out the financial planning assumptions for future years and aligned them with the Council Strategy to ensure that strategic objectives were delivered.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to Figure 2 in the report (core spending impact adjusted for council tax base), and queried whether the 4.99% assumed council tax growth correctly produced the figures shown and suggested that there may be an apparent mismatch and an implied cumulative difference. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter,

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s151 Officer stated that the figures had been lifted from government core spending power data, with additional council tax base reset and adjustments, but committed to check and revert with confirmed figures.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to Figure 8 in the report (revenue budget summary), and queried whether out-year figures reflected stated assumptions for council tax and social care precept. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter clarified that it reflected tax base change methodology and agreed to provide follow-up detail.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to Appendix A (Revenue Support Grant) and queried inconsistencies between the revenue support grant totals and the growth table. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter reported that the figure factored in some ring-fenced grant funding and offered to discuss the matter following the meeting.

Councillor Dominic Boeck requested clarification in relation to the SEND deficit funding. Joseph Holmes, Chief Executive, stated that in 2025/26 the government would fund 90% of the deficit, but beyond that (2026/27–2027/28) the percentage was unclear, and further detail was awaited.

Councillor Adrian Abbs expressed concern at the accuracy of the papers presented.

Sarah Clarke, Monitoring Officer, clarified that if a substantial change were required to the papers between Executive and Council, officers would consider whether it was material enough to require returning to Executive; otherwise, responses to the raised questions would be provided.

Councillor Brooks seconded referral of the report to Council to consider the below recommendation.

Recommendation:

- Unlike the Capital Strategy and Investment and Borrowing Strategy, the Council is not required to establish a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). However, it is a matter of best practice to undertake longer-term financial planning in support of the annual budget setting process.
- It is recommended that Council approve the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS is detailed in this report and appendices.

6. Treasury Management: Investment and Borrowing Strategy (C4679)

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 7), which sought to consolidate the investment and borrowing strategy for the year ahead by detailing how and where the Council would invest and borrow in the forthcoming year, within a particular framework.

Councillor Adrian Abbs raised concerns about the accuracy and certainty of figures within the papers, specifically the Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) requirement and noted the short timeframe to ensure clarity ahead of the forthcoming Council meeting.

Councillor Cottingham clarified that the EFS figure in the report was a borrowing facility up to a specific amount, and that the actual amount would be determined when it was drawn down.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded referral of the report to Council to consider the below recommendation.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that Council approve and adopt the proposed Investments and Borrowings Strategy for 2026/27.

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7. **Capital Strategy and Supporting Programme: Financial Years 2026/27 - 2029/30 (C4681)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which outlined the Capital Strategy period and the supporting funding framework, providing a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk was managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to the Executive meeting on 25 September 2025 which had agreed a £1.2m allocation (profiled £600k in 2025/26 and £600k in 2026/27) for a 3G pitch at Faraday Road and queried why the project did not appear in the capital programme for 2026-2027. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter, s151 Officer, clarified that whilst the provision was set up in the current financial year, it was expected to slip into 2026/27 and was described as externally funded. Shannon Coleman-Slaughter acknowledged that for transparency the project would be restated in the following year's budget to show the expected slippage.

Councillor David Marsh referred to a new primary school at Sandalford and queried why the majority of its funding was not reflected until 2030/31, when the developer Bloor Homes had indicated that the school would be built much earlier. Councillor Denise Gaines commented that developer discussions had focused on infrastructure and roads and had not provided an indication as to when the school would be built. Councillor Jeff Brooks promised to revert with clarification.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried why the Grazeley Solar Farm project was not included within the report. Councillor Cottingham responded that the solar farm was profiled in the current year and would be reprofiled depending on business case checks.

Councillor Brooks seconded referral of the report to Council to consider the below recommendation.

Recommendation:

- It is recommended that Council approve the Capital Strategy appended to this report and its sub appendices:
 - Appendix A – Capital Strategy
 - Appendices B & C – Capital Programme for financial years 2026/27-2029/30
 - Appendix D – Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Policy

8. **Financial Year 2026/27: Revenue Budget (C4680)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), which detailed the budget proposals for financial year 2026/27 and supporting Council Tax proposals and resolutions.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded referral of the report to Council to consider the below recommendation.

Recommendation:

Council Tax

- That Council approves the 2026/27 Council Tax requirement of £136.28 million, requiring a Council Tax increase of +2.99% with a +2.0% Council Tax precept ringfenced for Adult Social Care.

Revenue Budget

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- That the proposed General Fund net budget requirement of £210.9 million itemised in Appendix B is approved.
- That the fees and charges disclosed in Appendix C are approved.
- That the proposed savings disclosed in Appendix F and investments disclosed in Appendix E are approved.
- To note that a budget consultation was undertaken between 1st December 2025 and 12th January 2026. The consultation responses are disclosed in Appendix I.
- To note the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations totalling £139.99 million and agree that the schools block of £74.09 million is allocated to schools using the local formula agreed by The Schools Forum on 19th January 2026. The outline DSG budget by block is detailed in Appendix H. Members are asked to note that the expenditure budget set is more than income funding available, and it is therefore anticipated that the cumulative High Needs Block (HNB) deficit will be increased by +£16.98 million in 2026/27 to £31.53 million. The cost of financing the HNB is factored into the revenue capital financing requirement for 2026/27 and drives part of the Council's EFS request.
- That the Executive ratifies the EFS request to Central Government of £50 million, split between £20 million attributable to 2025/26 to provide resilience to the reserves position, and £30 million required to balance the 2026/27 revenue budget.
- It is further proposed that Council approve a 100% Council Tax discount for Care Leavers aged 18- 25 who reside in West Berkshire.

9. **2025/26 Q3 Financial Performance Report (EX4676)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which reported the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Q3 2025/26 outturn.

It was noted that there was an £8.5 million overspend, which was £1.7 million worse than at Q2, and with a forecast year-end net revenue outturn of £192 million versus an original budget of £183.4 million.

Councillor Cottingham explained that the main causes of the overspend were Adult Social Care pressure with both volume and price increases as the key pressures; and Children's Services pressure with increased costs due to high-cost residential placements.

Councillor Jeff Brooks adjourned the meeting for 10 minutes to speak privately with Councillor Ross Mackinnon. Councillors Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, Clive Hooker, David Marsh and Adrian Abbs left the meeting during the adjournment.

Councillor Mackinnon noted the demand growth in Adult Social Care and pressures in Children's Services, and queried what changes were being made to financial modelling to avoid a repeat of the scale of overspend. Councillor Brooks responded that provider price inflation was far higher than anticipated.

Paul Coe, Executive Director Adult Social Care, commented that market-management work was underway with providers with an aim to improve general efficiency, competition and innovation.

RESOLVED that: Executive were informed

- Revenue: The forecast Q3 revenue outturn is £8.5m/ 4.5% adverse to Budget. Total net revenue is forecast at £192.0m in the Q3 outturn, vs £183.4m in the Budget.
- Capital: Following 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 Q3 for the expected capital expenditure in 2025/26 is £50.8m against an updated

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budget of £59.2m resulting in an underspend of £8.4m. Members are also informed of the budget adjustments to the 2025/26 capital programme

10. **Contract for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive (EX4751)**

As Councillor Vicky Poole was not present in the Chamber, Councillor Jeff Brooks proposed the recommendations within the report.

Councillor Poole introduced the report (Agenda Item 11) which detailed forthcoming supply, service and works contract awards that would have a contract value in excess of £2.5m and as such would require approval from Executive during the next quarter.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried which board governed and had oversight of the procurement process. Councillor Poole responded that there was a Procurement Board, of which she was a member, and that the precise governance route would depend on the contract value and duration.

Councillor Mackinnon raised concerns about an apparent conflict of interest linked to Councillor Poole's professional activity. Sarah Clarke, Monitoring Officer, commented that Members were bound by the Code of Conduct and it was for individual Members to consider whether they were conflicted and act accordingly. Further it was noted that there was a formal process for raising complaints should someone believe a Member had acted inappropriately.

Councillor Poole responded that she declined any work connected to West Berkshire (and most Berkshire agencies) and that clients were checked for any West Berkshire contracts prior to engaging, and she offered to share details with the Monitoring Officer.

Councillor Howard Woollaston queried whether there was sufficient detail behind the contract awards and referred to past practice where contract awards had more detailed reporting. Councillor Brooks acknowledged the point and said the Council would ensure more detail and clarity on individual contracts going forward.

Councillor Iain Cottingham seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Delegate authority to the relevant Service Director in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Portfolio Holder to proceed with award of the forthcoming contract that has been identified in this report for award approval during the next quarter of the financial year.
- Delegate authority to the Service Lead - Legal and Democratic in consultation with the relevant Service Director to finalise the terms of any agreement as set out in the procurement documents and make any necessary drafting or other amendments (such amendments not to be substantial or material) to the terms of the agreement necessary to produce a final agreement for execution and to enter into that agreement.

11. **2025/26 Performance Report Q2 (EX4710)**

As Councillor Vicky Poole was not present in the Chamber, Councillor Jeff Brooks proposed the recommendations within the report

Councillor Poole introduced the report (Agenda Item 12), which provided assurance that the priority areas in the Council Strategy 2023-2027 were being managed effectively as at the end of September 2025, and where performance had fallen below the expected level, detailed remedial action taken and the impact of that action,

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Councillor Brooks noted that the format and layout of the report was being improved over time, and that the report now increasingly included not just RAG status but also what the remedial actions were being taken.

Councillor Heather Codling referred to high priority measure HP2 (eligible 2-year-olds taking up free nursery entitlement) and reported that significant outreach work had been undertaken including contacting families, and working through family hubs, libraries, and communications to encourage take-up.

Councillor Brooks referred to pothole repairs and highlighted that Q1 performance was affecting the overall position, but the trend had improved strongly.

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to HP2 and queried whether analysis had been undertaken by geography and socio-economic group, including whether the issue was worse in rural wards. Councillor Codling agreed to revert back with data.

Councillor Nigel Foot further added that the matter was also a priority of the Health and Wellbeing Board which was focusing on reviewing early years and deprivation/rural isolation.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried why there were no metrics relating to recycling. Beatriz Teixeira, Performance Research and Consultation Manager, commented that the main report focused on exceptions (amber or red indicators), but was confident that there was a recycling KPI in the 'green list', and would circulate to Members following the meeting.

Councillor Iain Cottingham seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- To note the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027 priorities scheduled for this financial year.
- To review those areas where performance is below target i.e., reporting as 'Red' or 'Amber', and note that the appropriate remedial action is in place.
- To approve the updated list of High Priority measures, which refer to the Areas of Focus for the implementation of the Council Strategy

12. **Expansion, remodelling and development of the SEND (McKee) Resource Unit (Phase 1) at Westwood Farm Schools Federation (EX4766)**

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 13), which sought approval for the expansion and remodelling of the McKee Resource Unit at Westwood Farm Schools Federation, increasing its capacity from 12 to 18 places and extending provision to Key Stage 2.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commended the proposal and queried whether there were the necessary resources to support the expansion. Councillor Codling acknowledged challenges in recruiting specialist SEND staff but expressed confidence due to the existing experienced staff and the unit being an expansion.

Councillor Denise Gaines seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Approves the expansion and remodelling of the McKee Resource Unit at Westwood Farm Schools Federation from 12 to 18 places, including the extension of provision into Key Stage 2.

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- Notes that the proposal supports the Council's SEND Sufficiency and Inclusion Strategy, delivering cost avoidance through reduced reliance on independent and out-of-area placements.
- Delegates authority to the Head of SEND, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Education, to oversee the implementation and ongoing monitoring of the expanded provision.

13. **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 7.40 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature