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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

THURSDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2026

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

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

Officers Present: Toby Bradley (Service Lead Financial Management), Sarah Clarke (Executive Director – Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director – Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director – Children's Services), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place), Martyn Sargeant (Service Director Strategy and Governance), Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal and Democratic), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Thomas Radbourne (Democratic Services Officer), Jon Winstanley (Service Director Environment) and George Winterbourne (Service Lead Finance and Strategic Assets)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Iain Cottingham

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2026, and of the extraordinary meeting held on 23 July 2026 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Leader.

Councillors David Marsh and Adrian Abbs to be recorded as present at the 2 July 2026 meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Stuart Gourley declared an interest in Agenda Item 8, as an employee of Atomic Weapons Establishment and reported that, as his interest was a disclosable pecuniary interest or an other registrable interest, he would be leaving the meeting during the course of consideration of the matter.

Councillor Vic Poole declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8, as a ward member of Burghfield and Mortimer and consequently determined to remain to take part in the debate and vote on the matter.

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 Heather Codling presented a petition on behalf of Winterbourne Parish Council containing 115 signatures relating to a proposal to reduce traffic speed limits through Winterbourne and on approach roads to Winterbourne. The petition was referred to the Highways Improvement Group.

Sam Jones, a member of the public, introduced an online petition containing 258 signatures requesting reinstatement of the No. 2 bus to its full route terminating at Pigeon's farm. The petition was referred to the Highways Improvement Group.

5. 2026/27 Q1 Financial Performance Report

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced a report (Agenda Item 7), which detailed the financial performance of the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets following the Quarter One 2026/ 27 outturn. It was noted that the report had been debated earlier in the week at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee, and Councillor Brooks reiterated that all services other than Children's Services were broadly in line with the budget.

Councillor Heather Codling commented that the budget had anticipated 24 residential placements for children, however the number had already reached 36. The cost of the placements had also increased significantly, however Councillor Codling noted that all measures possible were being taken to counter and mitigate the trend with earlier intervention and prevention.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon described the £9.3 million Quarter One overspend as the largest in the Council's history and argued that it represented a financial crisis. He noted that Councillor Brooks had described himself as 'comfortable' with the financial position at the Scrutiny meeting and queried how he could be. Councillor Brooks rejected the description of the Council as being in a financial crisis, and distinguished that he was comfortable with the Council's delivery of savings and services but was obviously concerned about the wider funding environment and the exceptional pressures affecting local government.

Councillor Mackinnon queried how much additional funding would be committed towards intervention and prevention in Children's Services. Councillor Codling responded that funding for family hubs and early intervention was supported through the Best Start in Life grant, however did not have the precise amount to hand.

Councillor Dominic Boeck suggested that, without firm action, the position could become an existential crisis and requested further assurance. Councillor Brooks responded that further measures would be brought forward and invited the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to maintain close oversight.

Councillor Adrian Abbs noted that the Council was nearing its 30% short-term borrowing limit and queried what would happen if it was reached. George Winterbourne, Service Lead for Finance and Assets, explained that the position was monitored daily, that discussions were taking place with external public-sector treasury advisers and that the Council did not expect to exceed the limit.

Councillor David Marsh expressed concern that transformation activity appeared to be over budget and could face an additional pressure if planned disposals did not proceed. Councillor Brooks responded that transformation expenditure should not be considered solely on the basis of immediate payback because the benefits could continue over several years.

Councillor Brooks noted that the previous week the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), had allocated £5 million over two years to the Council to support transformation. Some of that funding was expected to be directed towards Children and Family Services, SEND, school improvement and Adult Social Care initiatives intended to help people remain in their own homes. The detailed allocation had not yet been finalised.

RESOLVED that: Executive was informed that

- Revenue: All services apart from Children's Services are broadly in line with Budget. Additionally, the savings target is forecast to be higher than Budget. However, the impact of volume and rate increases in Children's Services is the primary driver of a corporate net Q1 revenue forecast +£9.3m/ 4.4% adverse to Budget. Total net revenue is forecast at £220.2m in the Q1 outturn, vs £210.9m in the Budget.
- Capital: The forecast Q1 capital outturn is £47.0m/ 85.4% of expenditure against Budget of £55.0m. Of the £47.0m capital expenditure incurred, £14.7m is expected to be funded by the Council. The remaining £32.3m is expected to be financed from external sources, primarily grants, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions. The impact this has on debt financing is covered in Section 8.
- Capital: £2.3m of the 2026/27 capital budget is proposed to be reprofiled into the 2027/28 capital programme. Included within the proposed capital reprofiling is planned Council funded expenditure (i.e. funded through planned borrowing) of £100k. Appendix A provides details of proposed Capital Reprofiling.

6. Grazeley Solar Farm Business Case

Councillor Stuart Gourley left the meeting for the duration of the item.

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 8), which provided an update on the latest position for the Grazeley Solar Farm project and sought approval for the project to continue. It was noted that the report had been debated earlier in the week at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee where Members had benefitted from the attendance and knowledge of the consultants who had produced the business case.

Councillor Ross Mckinnon reiterated a request made at the Scrutiny meeting for CO2 data and the costs of the project to date.

Councillor David Marsh referred to a recommendation agreed by the Scrutiny Committee which had suggested that the community be encouraged to buy into the project by the availability of public shareholding. Councillor Marsh further highlighted that Great British Energy had announced a fund to promote community energy and their relationship with public sector partners and encouraged the Council to explore any available grant opportunities. Councillor Brooks responded that the principle of looking for other funding streams and other partners was not dismissed

Councillor Heather Codling seconded the recommendations within the report.

Recommendations: (Vote to be taken in Part II)

- Executive is asked to approve continuation of the Grazeley Solar Farm project, subject to the allocation of appropriate funds through the Council's budget setting process, and to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder and Monitoring Officer, to enter into and let the necessary contract for delivery of the scheme.
- Executive is asked to endorse the addition of £4m to the 2026/27 capital programme and £11m to the 2027/28 capital programme, subject to approval by Council through the budget setting process.
- Executive is asked to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Resources, in consultation with the Finance Portfolio Holder, to submit a tender for the sale of energy generated by the Grazeley Solar Farm to Atomic Weapons Establishment.

7. Membership of the South East Regional Care Cooperative

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9) which requested agreement for West Berkshire Council to become a member of the South East Regional Care Cooperative (the RCC). It was explained that the RCC was intended to help councils work collaboratively to address increasing pressures within the children's care market.

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to a previous requirement for the Council to join a Foster Board and noted that it had led to a loss of control over some of the funding. Councillor Boeck sought assurance that joining the co-operative would not have the same result or remove local decision-making powers.

Councillor Codling explained the Council would retain responsibility for its statutory duties and that membership would enable collaboration rather than transfer responsibility to another organisation. It was anticipated that the co-operative would support commissioning and market-shaping activity while individual authorities would continue to make decisions about children in their care.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive:

- Agrees the Council's membership of the RCC
- Authorises Legal Services to make any necessary amendments to and when finalised seal all agreements required to give effect to the above and support delivery against the expectations of the DfE with relation to the Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

8. 2026/27 Performance Report Q1

Councillor Vic Poole introduced the report (Agenda Item 10), which provided assurance that the priority areas in the Council Strategy 2023-2027 were being managed effectively as at the end of June (Q1 2026/27), and where performance had fallen below the expected level, presented information on the remedial action taken and the impact of that action.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that the report had also been reviewed earlier in the week at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Adrian Abbs queried whether it was appropriate to re-baseline project deadlines and then classify performance as green, noting a number of target dates that had moved from 2026 to 2027 but continued to show as green. He was concerned that changing targets could mask delays and reduce transparency. Councillor Brooks acknowledged the point and suggested there may be value in retaining visibility of original target dates alongside revised dates so Members could see whether milestones had moved.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to questions raised at the Scrutiny meeting in relation to several performance indicators containing incomplete or missing data and noted that Portfolio Holders had indicated further information would be provided at Executive. Martyn Sargeant, Service Director for Strategy and Governance explained that some indicators were still work in progress, but that additional narrative would be included in future reports where data was unavailable.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that of the 11 high-priority measures, only five were green, and questioned whether the level of performance was acceptable. Councillor Vic Poole acknowledged that several indicators were below target but stressed that the performance framework used fixed thresholds, that some measures had been affected by

revised methodologies and that corrective action was already underway in several service areas.

Councillor Denise Gaines acknowledged disappointment in relation to high-priority measure HP5, and the delivery of only 24 homes against a target of 37. However, it was explained that there was often a lag between completions and registered provider reporting and that a further 92 homes were expected to be reported by Quarter Two.

Councillor Stuart Gourley referred to HP8 which measured completion of pothole repairs within target timescales noting that it was slightly below the 95% target at approximately 93.3%, however commented that there had been significant improvement from 73% in the previous year. He noted that the Council was currently transitioning to a new highways contractor but had confidence that target performance would be achieved.

Councillor Mackinnon reiterated his question as to whether performance was good enough for the high-priority measures, to which Councillor Brooks agreed that that performance was never good enough whilst any measures remained amber or red.

Councillor Dominic Boeck noted that only 5 out of 91 Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP), had been issued within the statutory 20-week timescale, which was significantly below target. Councillor Heather Codling responded that the Council had experienced a substantial increase in EHCP requests, as a consequence of national SEND reform, however staffing levels had increased and it was hoped that additional support would be provided through the new IDOX system funded through MHCLG transformation funding.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to a promise made by Councillor Codling at the Scrutiny meeting to explain why performance data relating to Children's Services had not been included within the report. Councillor Codling commented that the new Mosaic system was not yet producing all required performance reports. Alternative management information was available through internal reporting tools and officers were receiving operational performance reports even where Mosaic outputs were incomplete.

Councillor Brooks suggested that, where alternative data was available, it should be incorporated into future performance reports until Mosaic reporting functionality was fully operational.

Councillor Mackinnon expressed disappointment that whilst information had been promised at the Scrutiny meeting, it had not been provided. Councillor Brooks acknowledged that Portfolio Holders may have over committed and reminded officers that where there were future omissions of data, there needed to be adequate explanations recorded.

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 note a new measure proposed by Councillor Abbs and approved at the Council meeting on 16 July 2026 called "Report to Council on the deliverability, timescale and funding options for a new Community Sports Stadium at Faraday Road (31/03/2027)".

9. ASC Strategy post consultation outcome and Delivery Plan

Patrick Clark introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 11), which provided the Executive with a summary of the ASC Strategy public consultation, the impact of the feedback and accompanying Delivery Plan. It was noted that whilst it was not a statutory

requirement, having both the Strategy and an accompanying Delivery Plan provided a clear framework for priorities and implementation over the next three years.

Councillor David Marsh noted that only 88 responses had been received and questioned whether this level of engagement was sufficient. He argued that future consultations should seek broader participation. He further sought assurances about the future of the Council's resource centres and residential care provision. Councillor Clark responded that he could not provide an absolute guarantee covering the entire period of the Strategy because circumstances could change significantly over time. However, he stressed that any future proposals would be subject to full discussion and consultation.

Councillor Jeff Brooks further reiterated that there were currently no plans to dispose of resource centres or care homes.

Councillor Heather Codling seconded the recommendation within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive approve the ASC Strategy and Delivery Plan.

10. Youth Justice Plan 2026/2027

Councillor Heather Codling introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 12), which provided oversight of the annual Youth Justice Plan for 2026/2027 which would be submitted to the Youth Justice Board.

Councillor Justin Pemberton commended the work of the Youth Justice team as a successful partnership working across organisational boundaries which was consistently recognised as excellent.

Councillor Dominic Boeck echoed the praise and queried what work was undertaken to support and prevent children from entering the justice system. Councillor Codling responded that the Council worked closely with parents, Berkshire Youth, schools, Police and Health services in an attempt to prevent young people entering the criminal justice system.

Councillor Nigel Foot further highlighted a recent piece of co-production work which was being undertaken between the Council, Berkshire Youth and Get Berkshire Active, in relation to a particularly deprived estate in Greenham and which was hoped would provide a template for future work. Councillor Boeck welcomed the initiative and expressed interest in how its success would be measured. Councillor Foot promised to keep Members updated.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded referral of the report to Council.

RESOLVED that: Executive approved referral of the report and its recommendation to Council

- To agree and formally endorse the Youth Justice Plan 2026/2027

11. Members' Questions

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

12. 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 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, specified in brackets in the heading of each item. Section 10 of Part 10 of the Constitution refers.

13. Grazeley Solar Farm Business Case

(*Paragraph 6 - information relating to proposed action to be taken by the Local Authority)*

The Executive considered an exempt report (Agenda Item 15), which provided an update to Members on the latest business case for the Grazeley Solar Farm and recommended a way forward for the scheme.

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

Other options considered:

- A “Do Nothing” option has been considered. This would mean the Council not proceeding with the delivery arrangements required to construct and operate the solar farm. Although this would avoid committing to the capital delivery phase, it would also mean that the Council would not secure the strategic, environmental and long-term energy benefits associated with the scheme.
- The Do Nothing option would remove the opportunity to create a locally controlled renewable energy asset on Council-owned land and would require the Council to identify alternative ways to make a comparable contribution to its net zero commitments. It would also mean that the preparatory work already undertaken would not result in delivery of the intended renewable energy benefits.
- Alternative delivery and commercial approaches have also been reviewed as part of the wider business case work. The recommended approach remains for the Council to continue to progress the scheme while retaining ownership of the asset and procuring specialist expertise to deliver and operate it. This provides the best balance between strategic control, long-term value, risk management and deliverability.

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 9.00 pm)

CHAIRMAN ……

Date of Signature ……