

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2025

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Mayor);

Councillors Gittings (Deputy Mayor), Asare, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, Dennis, Eden, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Griffith, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keane, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, McCann, McElroy, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Mitchell, Moore, Naz, Nikulina, O'Connell, Rowland, R Singh, DP Singh, Stevens, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams, Woodward and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors Ayub, Edwards, Goss, Hacker, Lovelock and Magon

31. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor noted that this would be the last full Council meeting attended by the Monitoring Officer and Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services Mike Graham. Mike's first Council meeting had been in February 2020 just before the Covid pandemic and he had played a key role in supporting the Council's decision-making through the time of online meetings and many challenges since then. The Council thanked Mike for his service to Reading over the last six years.

32. PROPOSED MODIFICATION TO THE 'RIDGEWAY' LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PROPOSAL FOR OXFORDSHIRE AND WEST BERKSHIRE

Further to Minute 15 of the meeting of Policy Committee held on 21 July 2025, the Chief Executive submitted a report setting out the work undertaken to inform a proposed modification of the boundary between Reading and West Berkshire and seeking approval for a formal request for the modification to be submitted to the Secretary of State. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1: Proposed modification to the 'Ridgeway' Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire submission
- Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix 3: Full LGR criteria and guidance
- Appendix 4: Full options appraisal for original Ridgeway proposal and the amended version

The report explained that significant work had been undertaken to evidence and develop the proposal, including a wide-ranging engagement programme, service modelling, budget modelling, and wider research. A comprehensive data request had been sent to West Berkshire Council to inform the modelling but their response had largely pointed to publicly available data which did not provide sufficient granularity. Subsequent FOI requests did provide some data for demand led services, but officers still had questions outstanding. Consequently, the margin for error, particularly in relation to financial costs was greater than desired.

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The report noted that the initial proposal submitted to Policy Committee had covered five West Berkshire wards: Pangbourne; Theale; Tilehurst Birch Copse; Tilehurst & Purley; and Tilehurst South & Holybrook. The data demonstrated a good case for including Pangbourne and Theale in the modification, however the strongest case was for the three Tilehurst Wards, and that was therefore the recommended final proposal.

The report further noted that Reading, like the other Berkshire local authorities, had not been invited to submit proposals and was therefore limited to proposing an amendment to proposals from Oxfordshire. This made it difficult to demonstrate the benefits of a comprehensive Greater Reading area.

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Leng and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) That the report, the significant activity undertaken to inform the boundary modification request, and the data which underpins the case presented be noted;**
- (2) That the challenges in obtaining the data required to fully inform the service and financial modelling and the inherent risks associated with that be noted;**
- (3) That to protect Reading's future interests, it be agreed to submit to the Secretary of State, a modification to the Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation 'Ridgeway' proposal, such that the following Wards: Tilehurst Birch Copse, Tilehurst & Purley and Tilehurst South and Holybrook be transferred to Reading Borough Council, as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (4) That, subject to the Secretary of State's decision, the Chief Executive be authorised to establish the necessary project team and resources to implement the proposal;**
- (5) That Council reserve its right to make subsequent representations to the Secretary of State regarding the Borough boundary or Local Government Reorganisation in the future.**

33. DEVOLUTION

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to government in response to the Government's devolution policy and proposals set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, to position the Thames Valley region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The EOI was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

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The report noted that Leaders from across the region had been meeting to explore the opportunity for devolution arising from the government's policy for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor. These authorities would drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, strategic planning, skills, employment, and strategic transport infrastructure.

The report explained that an EOI for a Thames Valley MSA had been developed which emphasised the region's strengths in innovation and productivity and its readiness to enter discussions with Government regarding the possible creation of an MSA. Devolution via a MSA would drive inclusive growth and unlock significant opportunities for local communities and the UK more broadly. The EOI highlighted the economic rationale, collaborative governance, strategic powers and funding, and place-based leadership.

If approved by participating authorities the EOI would be submitted to government by 19 December 2025, followed by further engagement and refinement based on feedback from Council Leaders, Chief Executives, and stakeholders. Oversight of discussions with government and the development of future proposals was proposed to be through an informal 'Devolution Board' made up of elected representatives from each participating Council, with regular updates to Council and Policy Committee and public consultation as the process evolved. It was intended that Terms of Reference for the Board be reported to a future meeting of the Council.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Leng and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) That the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill be endorsed;**
- (2) That the joint Expression of Interest (EOI) attached at Appendix 1 be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State, noting that the EOI was designed to proactively position the region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme;**
- (3) That the EOI be acknowledged as an invitation to Government to open dialogue and engagement with the region regarding the potential form and operation of a Strategic Mayoral Authority, and not a decision to establish a Strategic Authority;**
- (4) That further update reports be brought back to Council as necessary and prior to any final decision to create a Strategic Authority;**
- (5) That it be noted that the informal Devolution Board would oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.**

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(The meeting closed at 7.29 pm)